

*Vanguard Studies  
of Soviet Russia*

VILLAGE LIFE UNDER  
THE SOVIETS

## VANGUARD STUDIES OF SOVIET RUSSIA

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*Vanguard Studies of Soviet Russia*

# Village Life Under the Soviets

By KARL BORDERS



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*To the sincere men and women of Russia who, despite  
prison, exile, and death, burned out their  
lives trying to attain freedom, peace,  
and brotherhood for the  
common people.*

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

### KARL BORDERS

Born in La Rue county, Kentucky, in 1891; A. B. Transylvania College, Kentucky; B. D. Union Theological Seminary, New York; graduate work in Columbia and Chicago Universities; teacher for two years in mission school in Manila, P. I.; Chaplain in U. S. Navy for one year; founder and director of small settlement among Russians of the west side of Chicago for five years, under auspices of the Disciples church; one year in Russia during this period as famine relief worker with the Quakers, six months of that year acting as field director; since 1925 Educational Director with the Russian Reconstruction Farms; at present assistant head president at Chicago Commons, Chicago.

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

THE Russian Revolution startled a war-diseased world and ushered in the most daring political and economic experiment of the twentieth century. Considering the vast territory affected, the radical changes inaugurated, and the influence which has been and still is being exerted on international relations, there is probably no greater event in modern history, whether for good or evil. Most Americans forget that a decade has already passed since Lenin and his Communistic followers assumed the power. The period of rapid revolutionary change has gone. Russia is painstakingly, step by step, building something different, something unique, something whose final destination is unpredictable.

America has been a land of discovery from its foundation. Not only in the realm of scientific invention, but in first attaining the coveted North Pole and in exploring other unknown areas of the world, Americans have given generously of life and treasure. Today we are uninformed about a great nation covering one-sixth of the land surface of the world. Russia is cut off by an Atlantic Ocean of prejudice, misunderstanding, and propaganda. We still maintain a rigid official quarantine about the Soviet Government. The result is ignorance frankly admitted by one "of the highest authorities in our Government," who declares this inevitable "in the absence of diplomatic relations." Judge Gary corroborates this verdict, "Like many other Americans, I am ignorant in regard to many of the

conditions which exist in Russia at the present time.”\*

Every scientist realizes that ignorance is one of the most dangerous forces in the world today. No matter how good or how bad the Soviet system, we should know all about it. Instead, we have been ruled by propaganda and hearsay.

The fact is that for the past ten years the Bolshevik government has been operated on, dissected, and laid in its coffin amidst loud applause and rejoicing by distinguished orators in all parts of the world; yet today it is stronger, more stable, than ever before in its history and its leaders have been longer in power than any other ruling cabinet in the world. It is high time that we appraise this government as scientifically and impartially as possible, without indulging in violent epithets or questionable and controversial dogmas. Surely the world is not so abysmally ignorant that after ten years of the rule of the Soviet we cannot discover a common core of truth about Russia.

Whether the Communists are thought to be “dangerous enemies of society” or the “saviors of humanity,” the facts should be known before judgment is pronounced. No matter what our conviction, we have to admit that the Bolsheviks are hammering out a startling new mechanism in the field of political control. Their experiment deserves scientific study, not hostile armies; intelligent criticism, not damning epithets.

In the past, America has been flooded with propaganda of all shades. Dr. E. A. Ross dedicates his last volume on Russia “To my fellow-Americans who have become weary of being fed lies and propaganda about Russia.” In his chapter on the “Poison Gas Attack”

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\* *Current History*, February, 1926.

he lists forty-nine stories broadcast throughout America which have been proved totally false. Other writers have pointed out similar facts. Walter Lippman, Editor-in-Chief of *The New York World*, in his illuminating study of all Russian news which appeared in *The New York Times* in the early period of the Revolution, has proved the stupidity, inaccuracy, and falsehood of the "facts and fabrications" which have passed as news. Even those articles and books which have tried to deal honestly with the subject have usually been inadequate. They have either been too general or they have been specific but too brief to be of more than passing value. In all too many cases they are based on only a few weeks of observation in Russia by someone who did not know the native language.

The present series is designed to meet the need for reliable, accurate information on the major aspects of present-day Russia. We have tried to make it as scientifically accurate as is possible in the treatment of contemporary phenomena. It has been our aim in selecting each author to choose someone who because of previous experience and training was peculiarly well qualified as an authority on the particular subject to which he was assigned. In every case we have chosen those who either have made a prolonged stay in Russia, actually writing their volumes while in the country, or those who have made a special trip to Russia to secure the facts about which they write. We have tried to make the series inclusive, covering the more important aspects of the many-sided developments in Russia. Each volume is devoted to one major subject alone. People want detailed, accurate facts in readable form. Here they can be found, ranging all the way from an

analysis of the governmental machinery to the school system. Within this series some repetition has been inevitable. The editor believes that this is distinctly desirable since each author expounds his subject in his own way, with an emphasis original to him and in the light of his own data. No effort has been made to eliminate contradictions, yet they are surprisingly few. Where the testimony of all is unanimous, the conclusions reached are overwhelmingly strong. Where differences exist, they should stimulate the reader to weigh the evidence even more carefully.

It is probably too much to hope that propaganda organizations will not endeavor to discredit any such genuine effort to arrive at the truth. Perhaps it is sufficient to say in refutation that no similar attempt to secure the facts about Russia from trained experts has yet been made in America or elsewhere, so far as the writer is aware. There is scant ground for intelligent criticism unless similar scientific studies have been made with conflicting results; even then time alone can proclaim the final truth. No sincere and unprejudiced scientist will deplore an effort to study and describe what has happened in the first experiment the world has ever seen in applied communism, even if mistakes have been made in the analysis.

These volumes on the whole not only contain the most valuable data so far available, but they will probably remain of permanent worth. In the future no real historian endeavoring to master the facts about the great political upheaval in Russia will care to ignore them. Is Russia the most tyrannical dictatorship of bloody despots that the world has ever seen? Is Russia the first step in the building of a new world order whose keynote will be industrial democracy? We do

not pretend to give here the final judgment of history, but we do claim to have made a sincere effort to portray the facts.

Thanks are due to the authors who have so painstakingly sought to present the truth as they found it, to the publishers for their assistance in making this a notable and usable series, and to all those whose labor, whether by hand or brain, has helped to give these volumes to the American public.

JEROME DAVIS,  
*Yale University.*

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JEROME DAVIS,  
*Yale University.*

## PREFACE

No one would be so rash, I think, as to thrust upon the book-bound public of America, with its high-powered presses and seemingly endless pulp supply, even a thin book with such a title without at least an effort to justify his presumption. Hence a bit of itinerary.

I have spent well on to three years in Russia since the Revolution, first as a worker with the Quaker relief forces in 1922, and again with the Russian Reconstruction Farms since 1925. I have learned to speak a language sufficiently near Russian to make me understood wherever I have wished to go. Practically all of my time has been spent directly in the village, where I have dealt with the peasant in the course of daily work. I was for nine months in Samara Gubernia in the lower Volga district where it was my duty to travel widely among scores of villages. I have spent more than a year as a member of the staff of an American organization operating a group of government farms in the North Caucasus grain and grape district, and while there participated in a rather exhaustive survey of the county in which the Farms are located. I later visited agricultural collective projects in the Tver Gubernia north of Moscow, and villages of the semi-forested section of the Leningrad Gubernia.

I read Russian with a fair degree of ease, and have depended largely upon contemporary journals and newspapers for general statistics and information. This source is always the freshest and, at the same time, often

has the virtue of being retailed by a speaker or writer who is seeking flaws in the department he is criticizing, from the vantage point of an insider—a point of some value to a foreigner seeking a fair view of the whole situation. The work has been completed in Leningrad where I have had access to a great library and have been most courteously received in various regional departments dealing with the different aspects of village work.

The undertaking of so limitless a subject in the bounds of so few pages can be justified only on the basis of a desire to get before the public a comprehensive outline of the principal phases of village life in Russia after ten years of Soviet rule. To make a composite picture of a form of social structure so widely variant as the scattered villages of this vast country is no simple undertaking. I am ready to accept individual stories of practically anything I hear about the country. Only last week I read in the evening newspaper of Leningrad that a group of explorers had found immured in the forests of Siberia a settlement of fifteen hundred persons who had been so long cut off from the outside world that they did not know that there had been a World War. They had not heard of the Revolution and thought the Czar was still ruling. Only two of the settlement were literate. In such a country anything can happen. But to draw general conclusions is another matter.

Throughout the study I have conscientiously tried to make my statements factual and have resorted to conclusions and opinions only in the closing chapter.

I am particularly indebted to the Russian Reconstruction Farms for the use of much material from the survey of Archangelskoe county in which I had a share, and for access to the general files of the Farms. Special gratitude is also rendered Hannah Pickering, who was

for a year research worker and statistician for the Farms, for the free use of material she had gathered, especially in the study of the tractor and collective agriculture. Officials of various departments which I have visited, and individual peasants as well, have always gone out of their way to assist me in the collection of data.

Karl Borders,  
*Leningrad, March 1, 1927.*



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

THE historical material of the first chapter is based principally on the following books which are recommended to the reader for further reference:

For a detailed description of the social life of the peasant and the conditions following the Emancipation: Wallace; *Russia*, 1877, Henry Holt and Company.

For a brief general history of Russia down to the Revolution: Beasley, Forbes and Birkett, *Russia from the Varangians to the Bolsheviki*, Oxford Press, 1918.

For the period of the Revolution itself, out of the mass of books that have been written, see: John Reed's classic, *Ten Days That Shook the World*; also, a remarkably balanced and fair treatment of this tremendous epoch, entitled *Bolshevik Russia* from the French of Etienne Antonelli.

And for the best recent reporting on the intimate life of the village: Maurice Hindus' *Broken Earth*.

The contemporary journals quoted have usually been cited in the body of the text. Chief among these is *Agricultural Life*, the official organ of the Department of Agriculture. The two newspapers most frequently used are *Izvestia*, the organ of the Central Executive Committee of the Soviets, and *Pravda*, the paper of the Russian Communist Party.



## TERMINOLOGY

*The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics*, or U. S. S. R., I have usually referred to as the Union or the Soviet Union. This union is composed of six large subdivisions, the Ukrainian, White Russian, Uzbekian, Turkmenian, South Caucasian, and Russian Unions or Federations. These, in turn, have in four cases autonomous national groups operating under the same general administrative head. Principal among the large divisions is the Russian Socialist Federation of Soviet Republics which includes the greater part of the agriculture and industry of the Union in its Russian confines and has, besides, twenty-three autonomous republics and districts of various nationalities federated with it. I have usually designated this great territory as Russia Proper. However, where I have spoken of the whole Soviet Union in a less technical sense, as in the last chapter, I have resorted to the commonly accepted sense of the old word and have said simply "Russia."

The most recent plans of territorial organization of the smaller units contemplates the establishment of large *Krais* or Sections, subdivided into *Okrugs* or Districts, and these again into what we would call counties. This reorganization has already gone into effect in some parts of the country, but much of the old system still remains. I have used the terms roughly in the American sense, with the exception of the:

*Gubernia*. These may be compared roughly to our

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states but they are territorially much larger, and I have simply transliterated.

*County and Township* I have used again roughly to designate the Russian Ooyezd and Volost. As a matter of fact the Ooyezd is much larger than our county, whereas the Volost includes a small group of villages that may be territorially smaller than our county. The new arrangement such as we found in the North Caucasus with its division into District and Rayon corresponds much more nearly to our State and County plan.

*Peasant and farmer* have been used interchangeably, though it will be seen at once that the Russian peasant in his mode of life and methods of farming is different in many respects from our own farmer.

The *Rouble* has not been transferred to dollars in every case. It may be roughly estimated at fifty cents, though as a matter of fact the exchange at present is one rouble ninety-four copeks to the dollar.

The Russian unit of land measure is the *dessiatine*, which is equal to 2.7 acres. In most cases I have translated to acres, except where the figures involve a comparison of various amounts of Russian land.

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# VILLAGE LIFE UNDER THE SOVIETS

## CHAPTER I

### WHAT WENT BEFORE

SOVIET Russia is overwhelmingly an agricultural country, and in spite of heroic measures for industrialization will continue so for many years to come. Eighty percent of her population live in villages. Seventy-five percent of all persons of working age in the Union are engaged in the actual cultivation of the soil.

There can be little wonder, then, that the "peasant question" should intrude even to the point of threatening Communist party solidarity today; no surprise that for generations the doggedly insistent demands of this great earthborn mass of toilers for more land have determined policies of state and prepared the ground for revolutions.

It is the purpose of this study to describe the life of the Russian village of today, after ten years of the Soviet regime; to estimate its gains, to report its ambitions. But no one can hope to understand the village of the present, without at least a passing acquaintance with the background out of which it has emerged, a past so like in its setting, so different in its hopes. Accustomed, as we are in America, to think in terms of a farmer traditionally free, hewing his domain out of the forest or

romantically conquering the plain with his plow, it is particularly difficult for us to enter into a sympathetic understanding of this grandson of bondsmen, the Russian peasant.

Therefore a bit of history.

According to the record of chroniclers as far back as the eleventh century, the merchant princes of Kiev were famous as dealers in furs and slaves. The wealthy man in Constantinople who wanted a good servant went to the Russian slave merchants. But as the Russian noble or merchant in the following centuries began to acquire great tracts of land his slaves were needed at home to till the soil and their numbers were constantly increased from the captives made by forays on neighboring princes. It is significant that in the earliest Russian legislation right to the land was claimed through ownership of the slaves that tilled it. And the corollary of this idea became firmly implanted in the mind of the peasant, who for centuries was wont to say to his master, "We are yours but the land is ours."

Down to the end of the sixteenth century the peasant was supposed to be free to move from place to place at will. Household servants continued to be held as actual slaves and were bought and sold as any other chattel. As a matter of fact, however, long before this time the peasant, too, had become for the most part actually attached to the soil, either by indebtedness to his master or by more open restraint. Consequently movement was possible only by running away, or by kidnapping expeditions by some powerful landowner into the villages of his weaker neighbor. This, of course involved separation from home and family and not freedom but simply a change of masters.

This actual state of serfdom was made legal by the

State following the great census completed in 1628, just at the time the Plymouth fathers were carving out a place of freedom for themselves in America. The peasants were inscribed, and had to remain where they were found. They were made the property of the landowners and the landowners were responsible for the collection of the taxes from them. While technical differences were maintained between the household slave and the peasant farmer, for all practical purposes they now composed one great body of serfs. They were all alike bought and sold or given away at the will of the master. This state of slavery was strengthened fifty years later by Peter the Great in his widescale drafts of labor for public works, such as the building of Petersburg, and in his zeal for exact record of the various classes of the State. The system reached its apex during the reign of Catherine the Great, which began in 1762. This prodigious dabbler in western European liberalism extended the scope of serfdom to the ends of the empire and greatly enlarged the control of serfowners. She herself made presents of 800,000 partly free peasants of the State lands to various favorites during her reign.

It was not until almost exactly a hundred years later, in 1863, the same year in which Lincoln's emancipation proclamation was issued, that under Alexander II the last of the Russian serfs were liberated. According to Wallace (page 473) the extent of serfdom at this time is indicated by these figures:

Entire population . . . . .	60,909,309
State Peasants . . . . .	23,138,191
Peasants on the Lands of Proprietors . . . . .	23,002,390
Peasants on Royal Family Lands, etc. . . . .	3,326,084

In other words more than two thirds of the entire population were in various stages of legal servitude to a comparative handful of their fellow men. The twenty-three million peasants belonging to private persons were the property of one hundred thousand landed proprietors. And of these the greater number were found on the enormous estates of the richer nobility. One nobleman, Count Sheremetief, to again quote Wallace, possessed more than 150,000 male serfs or more than 300,000 souls.

Thus in a few brief strokes we have dismissed two hundred and fifty years of the most widespread form of open servitude which has extended into modern times. Not all of the story is a sad tale. Here and there, even as in the history of our own two and a half centuries of legal slavery, were found masters with a real interest in the welfare of their peasants and a genuine human understanding of their feelings. But the law itself provided that, "The proprietor may impose on his serfs every kind of labor, may take from them money dues, and demand from them service, with the one restriction that they should not be thereby ruined, and that the number of days fixed by law should be left them for their own work." And further, "For all offenses committed against himself or against any one under his jurisdiction he could subject the guilty ones to corporal punishment not exceeding forty lashes with the birch or fifteen blows with the stick." Worse still he could send any disobedient serf to the army or have him transported to Siberia, punishments infinitely more feared than a beating. That these provisions of the law were fully used and often exceeded, we have the ample testimony of literature and history. And the echoes of those days ring even into this generation.

Only a few months ago as I rode through the country district of Leningrad Gubernia with a peasant of the neighborhood, he pointed out an estate of a former landowner who had been a terror to all his peasants. From a tower still standing in the garden he used to watch the workmen in the fields with glasses, and at the end of the day report laggards to the overseer for punishment. Huskies armed with birch branches waited in the barn and many a peasant was carried home with a bleeding back, too weakened to walk. My companion told me how his own grandfather had been beaten to death by an overseer of this same landlord. One day he was ill and did not report for work. The boss ordered birches, and himself beat the sick man while four other peasants held him. Next day when the overseer called he found the grandfather dead. He took a casual look at the body and laconically remarked: "Well, he must have been sick after all."

And that closed the incident. It was unfortunate, no doubt, that his misjudgement had lost a serf to his master. But so was the death of an ox a loss.

To cite only one other instance, the farm in the North Caucasus on which I lived for some time is called Plakseika, "The place of weeping," in memory of the terrible cruelty with which the master drove his serfs to the digging of a canal that runs through the estate. Local tradition tells how scores of men were actually killed during this work by beating and exposure.

Multiply these cases by the thousands all over Russia and there can be little wonder that even the patient peasant again and again rose up in spasmodic undirected wrath against such masters, burning their houses and often murdering them outright. Nor is it strange that even such a pretender as the famous Pugachev in



Catherine's reign should have drawn thousands of peasants after him to pillage landlords who had themselves been freed from compulsory service to the State while the serfs continued in bondage. The wonder is that much more widespread arson and murder were not practiced.

But even the Emancipation, though always spoken of as a great reform, did not ameliorate the condition of the peasant to a great degree. He found himself "free" with all the rights and obligations of a citizen, but without sufficient land and obliged to pay heavy rents and taxes. This failure to receive the land freely with his liberation was a phenomenon he could not understand. By the terms of the Emancipation edict, the peasants were to retain the land which had long been assigned to the village commune. For this land the village had to pay rent to the landlord or buy it from him at once, through the aid of a government loan. This came as a great boon to the landowners, many of whom were impoverished through reckless expenditures in European capitals where they spent most of their time. Many of their estates were already mortgaged. This excellent new arrangement gave them much needed cash, and at the same time relieved them of the necessity of caring for their serfs. The peasant, on the other hand, received far too little land and this was almost always of the poorest quality on the estate. Whereas the landlord formerly had the same interest in him that he had in his livestock, he was now simply a dependent renter and often worse off than before. His own lands were insufficient to support him and pay his rents and taxes, so he was compelled to work for the landlord for nominal wages or to send members of the family off to the city to work in the factories during the winter. Besides, the district land captains, who

represented the government in the collection of taxes and in the administration of land questions in general, soon came to be as heartily hated as the landlords themselves had been.

Now the peasantry and his institutions had been a subject of reforming oratory and journalism from the earliest days of revolutionary activity in Russia. But when the movement began to "go to the people" in 1874, the young enthusiasts who carried the ideals of liberty and the high sounding phraseology of a new political fervor to the village were shocked to discover that their oratory fell on deaf ears and the very people they went to help turned them over to the police. But the peasant knew what he wanted. His needs were simple and concrete—land and freedom from oppressive taxes and tax gatherers. But this ancient desire did not really find articulate expression among the farmers themselves until 1905, following in the wake of the hard times precipitated by the disastrous Japanese war. Peasant disorders spread throughout the country. Forests were cut without permission, barns were burned, and vast numbers of peasants refused to pay rents and taxes. Finally the movement resulted in the organization of a Peasants' Union whose chief demand was "All the land for those who labor on it."

Three principal institutions among the farmers had contributed to this new sense of unity and had provided experience in self-expression which made possible formulated and unified demands. Two of these, the ancient village *mir* or "council," and the cooperative movement, will be treated in detail. The third, a more or less anomalous institution known as the *zemstvo*, sprang up after the Emancipation. It was not a complete form of self-government, for many of the activi-

ties of the central authority, including the command of the police and collection of taxes, continued to operate alongside the new organ. It is also to be noted that the franchise in the local elections was based on the ownership of property, which, even assuming absence of any outside pressure on the part of the landlords who still held the economic whip handle, gave the peasants less than half the representation of the landlords, while a third group was elected from the towns. The work of the zemstvo consisted chiefly in the practical concerns of the districts, the building and repairing of roads and bridges, maintenance of hospitals and schools, and later such practical aids to agriculture as experiment stations and even depots for the sale of agricultural machinery. Thus the peasants were at least acquainted with the possibilities of representative government and were gradually prepared for the significant role they were called to play in 1917.

Let us hope that enough background has been traced to show that the revolution on the part of the peasant did not simply happen, but grew inevitably out of insufferable conditions. The war called these same long-suffering peasants from their remote villages by the million and sent them out illy clad and poorly fed to die for a cause of which they knew little and loved less. More than seven millions of them were left dead on the Galician or German front or sent home maimed. The rest, exhausted, disillusioned, and resentful, had begun to throw down their arms and start back to the village long before Brest-Litovsk. To quote John Reed's classic, *Ten Days*, "In the long run everything depended on the peasants. . . . The Bolsheviki had a comparatively small following among the peasants; and a permanent dictatorship of Russia by the industrial workers

was impossible." But in the end, the peasant congress joined the newly formed Soviet government and aided in giving form to the process of land appropriation which had already begun without law or order in every part of Russia.

But the woes of the patient peasant were not over. There followed three years of civil war, intervention, and blockade with the destruction and stoppage of production. Red and White surged back and forth across the villages, taking horses and grain as they needed it. Guerilla bands of Greens robbed and butchered Red and White impartially. Out of Siberia, up from the Black Sea, along the whole western front swarmed Kolchaks, Wrangels, Denikins and their like, backed by foreign gold. America had her own ignoble share in the occupation of Archangel with the British. Meantime, while the cities starved, all possible food was sent to the Red Army. Peasants that should have been at the plough were kept standing guard against the tightening belt of foes. Then when Soviet Russia was reduced to a thin strip from Moscow to Leningrad, a military miracle began, and little by little the encircled enemy was pushed back. But it was not until the end of 1920 that the last of these was vanquished. Then, as if nature conspired to wreak complete destruction upon the stricken country, came drouth and hunger stalking through the land, taking a toll so terrible that even those who passed through it can not today, to their happiness, regard it as real but shudder as in memory of a gruesome nightmare. No estimate of the present condition of the village can be fair if it forgets that all this lies behind and that it was not until 1923 that the country as a whole could really begin the staggering task of reconstruction.

## CHAPTER II

### THE VILLAGE AND THE VILLAGER

To understand the village in Russia it is necessary, first of all, to abandon most of the ideas we have associated with that term in America. The Russian farmer does not go to town on Saturday afternoon. He lives in town, with rare exceptions, and goes out to his land when it needs attention. Nor does the term imply a small population. I have known villages with populations as high as ten thousand—as great as that of some of our cities that boast Great White Ways—which are, nevertheless, true agricultural communities, the vast bulk of whose population is engaged in the actual cultivation of the soil. Even the centers of population listed in Russian statistics as towns or cities, as a matter of fact often have large agricultural populations, for the classifications are made on the basis of administrative function rather than on that of the occupations of the inhabitants. Three sizes of villages are indicated by the terms *posyolok*, *derevnya*, and *selo*. The first may be a group of ten houses; the last, as I have said, may be a center of considerable population strung for miles along a wide dusty road or clustered about the banks of a stream, though the actual distinguishing feature of a *selo* is the fact that it boasts a church, while the *derevnya* does not.

From the outset of this study, too, the reader must be warned against general conclusions about "Russia." It

must be remembered that the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics, with its six autonomous republics and numerous small racial independencies within these larger divisions, occupies one-sixth of the landed area of the earth. This vast territory, stretching from the frozen tundra of the Arctic to the semi-tropical section of Trans-Caucasus, and filling the great gap between western Europe and Mongolia, contains within its borders not less than forty varied racial stocks, with even more differing dialects and languages. It counts as its subjects the nomad of the Kirghiz steppe, the Laplander, and the polished city dweller of Moscow or Leningrad. Therefore, we must consider any general statements either as averages or efforts to appraise the medium, on either side of which probably lies an infinite shading in details. I have some personal knowledge of the villages of Leningrad Government in the north, Samara Government on the middle Volga, and the more recently settled and agriculturally advanced area of the North Caucasus. A crescent line drawn through these points will cut the principal agricultural areas and give a fair medium view of the village life of the Russian Socialist Federation of Soviet Republics, the center and the largest part of the Union.

#### A VILLAGE OF THE STEPPE

In outward appearances, the village has probably changed little in centuries. Certainly Wallace's study of life and customs in the villages, written in 1875, after six years spent in intimate touch with all sides of Russian life, might, as far as much of its descriptive material is concerned, have been written yesterday. Two main types of village are determined by the build-

ing material used and by the setting. The village of the forested areas of the north is, of course, built of logs and set by pleasant lakes or the numerous streams that thread the fields and woods. The village of the vast area of woodless prairie of the south and east, however, finds logs far too expensive for the ordinary farmer and the house is usually made of large sun-dried brick, made of clay mixed with straw. It will perhaps be simplest to look first at one of the villages of the south and then to view briefly a small village of the Leningrad Government in the north.

Maslov Kut is a medium sized village of the county of Archangelskoe of Ter District in the North Caucasus. The county has a population of 39,000, divided among thirty-seven villages which range in size from a little more than 100 souls to more than 10,000. Maslov Kut has a population of 3,600. But it is customary to calculate in terms of the number of houses, or courtyards, in this case 750. The village lies within a mile of the railway, which is lucky, for often villages are a day's journey away from the railway, so that this is really a metropolitan luxury. Many stories are told of the village priest going out with cross and incense at the head of his flock in the old days to ward off the iron demon from coming too near the town. Besides, engineers who laid railway lines along arbitrary routes as indicated by Czars or shared with contractors the increased cost of laying longer lines, were not overly careful to make the most convenient stops. From the rising ground at the station the hundreds of roofs thatched with a tall, dun, river grass can be well seen lying among the locust trees. Rising above these low one-storied cottages, the only two buildings in the town of any architectural significance stand out; the old

wooden church with its inevitable five cupolas and a belfry, and the house of the former landlord, built solidly of stone and plaster after the fashion of the southern plantation mansions of the old South in the United States. Here and there, if we look closely, we may see a tiled roof, or one of tin, almost invariably painted green. These are indications of social status, a sort of brown stone front, and a girl is counted lucky indeed who marries into a house with such a cover.

If it happens to be the rainy season of fall or spring, we shall wade into the village through seas of mud. If it is midsummer, we turn our nostrils leeward and plough through a dust storm, if the wind chances to be high. There is little alternative, unless an exceptional winter brings snow. Such a village knows no sidewalks. The center of the street, having been worn deepest by traffic, provides the drainage. The German colonists a few miles distant have thrown up a carefully graded bank in front of their fences which acts as a tolerable bridge in rainy weather. When I asked one of the Germans why the Russians did not follow their example, being a good sober Mennonite he replied that the Russians were afraid they would fall off a sidewalk sometime when they were drunk and break their necks.

The houses, on closer examination, prove to be very simple structures. They are, for the most part, set immediately on the street. If the mistress is a good housekeeper, the entire outside surface of the mud brick walls will be plastered with an ill-smelling concoction of clay and manure at least once a year. When the surface is dry, it is usually whitewashed, or a bit of color, preferably blue in this district, may be added to the lime. The simple façade of the cottage depends for its decoration on the scroll work about the windows



or under the gable. These decorations show signs of once having been gaily painted, but all such luxuries have suffered during the lean years so that the general effect of the village is a drab brown. Now and then a pretentious house thrusts a portico out in front. But this is for purely decorative purposes. The entrance is at the side of the house, through the pedestrian's gate. Alongside this gate is the wagon entrance which leads into the courtyard. The whole yard is enclosed by a high wall, or at least a substantial fence, made either of the ever-present mud brick or of woven willow branches. Underneath the window on the street is almost invariably found some sort of bench, wooden in the case of the better-to-do families, or in other cases again of plastered mud. Here, when the weather is at all favorable the grandmother and the younger children will sit by the hour, and during the leisure periods of the evening the working members of the family gather as well, to talk with their neighbors and munch sunflower seed.

Maslov Kut lies on the higher bank of a muddy little river which rises in the Caucasus mountains and rushes down to lose itself in the sands and swamps on its way to the Caspian. Therefore the village conforms to the crooked stream rather than follows the usual principle of one long, wide main street with tributaries. But like all villages, the central place, geographically speaking, is occupied by the church. The drunken-looking old towers were built in the time of Catherine the Great, of massive hand-hewn logs. Its architecture is one of the common types found throughout Russia, a cluster of five domes with the great one in the center rising above the other four. The belfry is a separate structure some twenty-five feet distant, connected by

a cloister. The church and the little cottage of the deacon nearby are surrounded by a high burnt-brick wall, which, it is evident from the apertures for rifles, had other uses than keeping the cattle out of the churchyard. At the top of each of the two great iron gates holy pictures look calmly over the square and the pious still raise their hats and cross themselves as they pass.

Around the large square whose center is occupied by the church the principal buildings are to be found. The headquarters of the village soviet are recognized immediately by the red flag floating above the door. As a matter of fact, the flag of our village has faded to a very sickly pink, which offers a butt for discreet jokes on the part of some of the villagers. The house is brick with a tin roof, the residence of one of the rich villagers of the old days. Beside the soviet building is the village reading room with a sort of lean-to addition to the same building set aside for an emergency jail. The medical clinic occupies another former residence on the other side of the square. The main school of the three of the village stands out in the square near the church, a symbol of the old relationship between the two institutions. The cooperative has established a branch booth in the square for the sale of tobacco and is remodeling a building, also on the square, for further extension of its business. The old master's house, now headquarters of one of the great government farms, occupies one of the corners of the quadrangle. The square of Maslov Kut, too, like that of all villages of any significance, has its monument to the martyrs of the Revolution, in this case a simple brick pedestal surmounted by a wooden pyramid, topped by a hammer and sickle. Near this monument all outdoor demonstrations and public speeches are staged. Many

of the villages have built speaker's platforms and much more ambitious monuments.

A few blocks away the consumers' cooperative has its main store, while on the corner opposite it one of the two private stores of the village flaunts itself. One block farther the producers' cooperative occupies a courtyard with its buildings for grain purchasing, a small store for the supplying of agricultural needs, and various warehouses. Still farther up the street is the open space devoted to the weekly market held there every Wednesday. You may have your horse shod at the shop of the Government farm. The shoemaker you may find by asking where he lives, if you do not know. He does not hang out his sign. For your drugs and your vodka you must go to the county seat, four miles away. Likewise, if you insist on having your clothing made away from home, you must visit the tailor there. Not even a barber's sign decks the square and the only movie that visits the village comes for one night stands now and then to the club house of the Government Farm, which is also used as the social center of the village. In this respect Maslov Kut is poor, for the *Narodni Dom* (People's House), as the Social Center is called, is usually one of the most important buildings of the village. But there has been little building since the war and villages have thus far had to be content with the structures left them from the old regime.

One of the busiest spots in Maslov Kut is the artesian well which is also on the church square. From morning till night there waits in line a stream of peasant wagons with water barrels to be filled with this precious cargo for the distant work in the fields. Sturdy Rebeccas have beaten a path to its flow with their bare feet, balancing two heavy buckets on a yoke laid across

their shoulders—a feat which I respect heartily after trying it myself. And at the rivulet where the abundant fountain flows off to irrigate the gardens that lie nearby, housewives beat out the linen of the family wash. I have many times seen the washing done through a hole in the ice in the villages of the north.

Such is Maslov Kut and, in general, all her neighbors as seen by the casual visitor. Not beautiful nor picturesque, unless seen at a distance with the outlines of the church domes soaring above the dull level of the cottages, and then best on a rosy morning when the smoke is rising from the kitchen fires and curling lazily above the treetops. The thousands of other villages that dot the great woodless plains of the south and east differ only in details. The larger villages, which are usually also county administrative centers, will have more stores and a number of barbers, photographers, bootmakers and the like will hang out their signs. This is particularly true of the villages with well attended markets, whose weekly crowds from all the surrounding villages offer possible customers. And except for one or two of the distinctly Soviet signs of occupancy, the same picture might have been drawn a hundred years ago.

### *Ivan Ivanich at Home*

Let us now look more closely at a farmer's house and courtyard. We shall find him a hospitable man, and, if we are not suspicious characters, he will call off the dog, or dogs, and invite us in. In the daytime the smaller gate will usually be unlatched. At night all gates will be securely barred and the master and his family will be entrenched in their castle, only to be roused after much knocking and shouting. Then, if

we are admitted, there follows a great rattling of chains and bars as first the door and finally the gate is opened. But it is best to visit in the daytime. Once inside the court we find ourselves in a compactly arranged quadrangle which encloses within its four sides the home, barns, granaries, tool sheds, and, if it is a home of any pretensions at all, the bathhouse of the family. We shall be invited into the house at once, and if we are interested, will be shown the out-houses later.

There is probably a little veranda running along the side of the house, which invariably turns its gable toward the street. Through this we enter by a door which is never high and may be so low, if it is a humble cottage and fuel is scarce, that even a short man needs to stoop. If our host is a middle or well-to-do farmer, he will have two rooms or even three, in which case we first go into either the kitchen or a dark entry hall and then into the large all-purpose room. Three things strike the foreigner at once in a Russian home: the huge brick stove, the holy corner of ikons, which is still found in practically all the houses, and, in well-kept houses, an immaculately scrubbed floor on which you hesitate to tread. The stove is a wonderful institution, which by the variety of its functions somewhat compensates for the quarter of the room it occupies. The stove proper, which is operated by the simple method of stoking the large arched brick chamber with wood until it is very hot and then withdrawing the coals, serves for all the operations of cooking and baking, and in some parts of the country provides a very effective steam bath for the intrepid devotees of cleanliness who crawl into its maw.

In the winter the top of the stove provides a favorite sleeping place for the old folk and the children, and, if

the family is not too large, the whole household may pile on its tropical crest. Steps are always carefully included in the architecture for facilitating this function. The cat prefers the corner of the ledge in front of the oven proper, while the most prolific cockroaches I have ever encountered find hibernation in various convenient cracks about the corners.

If the house boasts beds besides the stove top, they are usually home-made affairs of wood, springless, with a solid wooden floor and provided with a straw mattress. The chief problem with beds is to get them out of sight. For this purpose a curtain may be drawn from the stove to the wall, or as in the case of one house of a well-to-do farmer where I lived for sometime in Samara Government, a partition is built across one end of the room with a small door leading into the bedroom. Windows in all village houses are built solely for the bit of light they provide, and since nobody wants to sleep in the light it is never considered necessary to cut windows in these sleeping corners. I once suggested such an innovation in the home of a worker on an American operated farm in the North Caucasus, but the worker simply laughed and replied, "I'm not going to read or write there. So why the trouble?"

The second room is also provided with a peculiar stove whose chief virtue lies rather in the conservation of heat than its production. Its principle is that of a simple brick box with an iron door which can be sealed tight and a damper for closing the box at the top when the fuel has burnt out. The idea is to heat the bricks and retain the heat. The tight-fitting door also serves to keep in the "fragrance" of the fuel, usually dried manure brick which is made in the spring and summer from the stable cleanings. These are ordinarily made

by the women who often tramp out the mixture of water and manure with their feet and mold it into the forms with their hands. The bricks are then piled at some convenient place near the edge of the village, where they are made, and when thoroughly dry are brought in and piled in the shed for winter. The stoves are usually built so as to provide heat for two rooms.

During the winter every window is carefully sealed tight with putty or strips of paper, and all better houses are built with double windows besides. The fresh air fiend has a small hinged pane in one of the windows which is opened when the stove is fired in the morning. This hermetical life retains in the room all winter a peculiar odor which smites the stranger as soon as the door is opened. It was a long time before I discovered that this is a perfume emanating from a combination of two sources; imperfectly tanned sheepskin coats and the smoke of a weed called *mahorka*, which claims some distant relationship to tobacco.

The furnishings of the house are extremely simple. A plain table or two, not more than two or three chairs, probably made by the village carpenter in a very severe and uncomfortable style, and a long bench or two around the wall. Some shelves on the wall or possibly a cabinet hold the few dishes and brass or copper cooking utensils. And a samovar, of course, for boiling water for the tea. The humblest of cottages is equipped with this indispensable "self boiler." Some families have two or more of varying sizes to suit the number of cups needed.

The great Russian institution of tea drinking has perhaps done more to prevent diseases spread by bad water than any amount of education or official sanitary

measures might have done. I remember hearing a citizen of one of the villages of Samara Government say that he had not tasted water in any form but tea for ten years. Tea may possibly mean a flavoring of some savory bark or leaf, but it always means boiled water. And the traveler, too, is not deprived of his tea, for he invariably carries his teapot, and every railway station of importance has a huge free boiler of *kipitok*, or "boiling water."

Another peculiar household convenience is the *umivalik*, a word derived from the verb "to wash." It is a little tin tank suspended from a nail on the wall, with a plunger in the bottom which acts as a valve. A trickle of water is secured by cupping the hands and pushing the plunger up. A basin of some sort is placed on a stool beneath to catch the waste water. If there is no such apparatus in the house, the host will pour water over your hands while you wash. Russians abhor any form of bathing in still water if they can avoid it, as we shall see when we visit the bathhouse. A small kerosene lamp provides all the light that is needed for the evenings. The better homes will have a wardrobe for clothing, or even a chest of drawers. Practically every house has a huge chest, often bound with iron or brass straps, like a pirate's strong box. Certainly it must have a lock, with probably an additional padlock. Here the family treasures will be kept, from the master's savings to the daughter's best dress.

### *The Family Wardrobe*

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found together elsewhere. I believe one can wear more outlandish costumes in Russia without exciting comment, particularly during the last few lean years, than any place in the world. All within reason, of course. When a bold American woman goes abroad in knickers or breeches for the first time in a community, all eyes are turned in her direction, and the things that are said are not always complimentary. But the same village may, within its hundred families, display *dedushka* in bark shoes, cloth wrapped calves and sheepskin coat, and his grandson, Ivan, in city shoes, bellbottomed trousers and a coat and cap that might have been bought at most any "gents' furnishing store" on Main Street. White collars have not yet gripped the throat of the innocent villager, and the typical Russian blouse with a bit of tasteful embroidery at the collar and sleeve and down the front is still one of the most picturesque features of the peasant costume. Give the young swain a bright shirt of this description, generous breeches tucked into shining top boots, and crown it all with a rakish fur hat set at the proper angle and you have a combination hard to resist. Boots are, on the whole, the most practical footgear for the village because they are built waterproof. In the summer most of the family go barefoot or wear sandals.

In the more intimate facial outlines of the peasant, cartoonists will soon be reduced to desperation and humorists dependent on Russian jokes driven to beggary. For haircuts are coming more and more into vogue even in the village, and Gillettes are displayed in the humblest markets. The younger men are clean shaven, and there is little likelihood that the beards and flowing locks of the grandfathers who bask in the sun on the street bench will ever be in style again. And

what is more, the boyish bob has come to the village. Not in great numbers, it is true, but frequently enough to make a short haired woman a not uncommon sight.

The increase of manufactured goods has robbed the women, particularly, of much of their picturesque dress. For while the cotton prints attempt bright patterns, often with good effect, the costumes of the more cosmopolitan villagers do not compare with the effectiveness of the bright homespun woollens and embroidered linens still to be found in the more remote sections, particularly in the Ukraine. The skirts are full and discreetly long, whatever the material, and all girls covet, if they do not possess, a pair of shoes or slippers with high French heels. In the folk costumes, decoration is expended on the apron and the full-sleeved blouse, which are often beautifully embroidered. The skirt owes its success to color, which tends to run to bright orange or red. But whatever costume she may wear, the peasant girl invariably crowns the effect with her *platok* or "scarf," bound about her head by a simple knot at the back of the neck or under the throat. These, too, run to gay colors, and red, which was always regarded as beautiful, even to the extent of being widely used as a synonym for loveliness, continues to be a favorite with its added significance.

The dress of the village is on the whole disappointingly drab and colorless to the foreigner who is expecting costumes out of Russian fairy tales, and he will have to go far into the hinterlands to find the gay folk dress of the different sections. This is a loss which must inevitably be sustained in the leveling process of industrialization which is so devoutly desired throughout all Russia, and is already evident in the villages near the cities.

The winter outfit of the village, however, which is at once most sensible and very picturesque, will probably remain for many years to add a distinct character to the countryside. Assuming proper house clothing, let us begin at the feet to dress for a long drive in a sleigh on a midwinter day. First come the clumsy but comfortable heavy felt boots, called *valenki*. Then an ordinary fur-lined or sheepskin overcoat, and a fur cap of some sort, preferably one that comes down over the ears. And, last, that all enveloping mother-hub-bard, sheepskin top-coat called a *sulup*. It is distinctly a family institution, used by whoever is going on a journey. Its ample folds reach almost twice around the stoutest of figures, and drag the ground except on the tallest. The sleeves are always sufficiently long to cover the hands, and almost obviate the necessity of gloves unless the wearer is driving. The huge collar, when turned up, reaches high above the head. Once in such a garment, the victim is helpless. A friend must come to his assistance for the final ministrations. A strong homespun girdle, dyed in bright colors, is produced and wrapped twice around the middle. The knee of the helper is then placed firmly against the back, as I have seen the loose girth of a horse adjusted, and the girdle is deftly tightened and made fast. Finally a string is produced and the collar is tied about the head so as to leave a bare peep hole. Dressed in this fashion you may ride for twenty miles in a sleigh with perfect comfort.

The first mentioned garments are the customary garb about the village during the winter. The felt boots are worn without any covering during the frozen weather. If it is wet under foot, goloshes are either put on over the boots or the usual leather boots are

donned. The ordinary coat worn for walking and work is cut short for convenience. In every case the wool or fur is sensibly turned in, and the plain, village-tanned leather turned out. The effect is not unlike a settlement of great brown bears going about their business.

### *Dinner Time*

And now to return to our visit. We shall certainly be asked to eat if it is near mealtime. The farmer gets up and works until nine or ten, and then has breakfast, which usually consists of bread and tea, perhaps some kind of porridge. The principal meal comes about three o'clock. There must be soup of some kind, and there are several varieties, each with its name and formula. To mix them is a sacrilege. If there are guests, as in our case, there is salt fish, garnished with onions and sliced cucumber pickles. Meat and potatoes compose the chief course, and there is probably also a generous slice of meat in the soup. The housewife has probably dried such fruit as she could get, and this will be offered as a stewed sweet dish or in a sweet soup. In the wheat-growing sections of the south, white bread, or at least a wheat bread with the greater part of the bran left in, is common. But in the north, where rye and barley are the chief bread grains, a heavy black bread is the rule, and white bread is a luxury to be used only on holidays and special occasions. The chief pride of the Russian cook is the things she can do with flour. Meat cakes, cabbage cakes, meat-filled dumplings, all kinds of tarts, cakes, and fancy pastry can come out of the Russian stove under the magic of a good cook, particularly around such festive times as Easter. Cabbage,

too, is a staple and always forms one of the chief articles of the garden. It is pulled up by the roots and stored in the cellar or chopped up as a sort of kraut to appear all winter in soups or now and then as a wrapper for delicious chopped meat. In general, however, all vegetables are considered as the materials for soup and are not greatly esteemed or used by themselves.

Before the meal is begun, if the family is a religious one, they will all piously cross themselves toward the ikon corner, which, incidentally, is called the "red corner." The housewife decorously helps the plate of the guest or he is urged to do so himself, while the rest of the family fall to eating, with evident satisfaction, from the common dish. Wooden spoons of generous proportions are used for the soup. We shall be encouraged again and again to "eat, eat," for when the Russian peasant has food enough, there is not a more generous host to be found.

Tea is a ceremony in itself, and is served after the meal is finished. The samovar, when skillfully fired with charcoal, boils very quickly and continues a pleasant purr long after it is placed on the table. It is the custom to serve tea to men in glasses and to women in cups. Preserves of some kind or honey are offered with the tea and are usually put directly into the glass to lend a flavor. A hard lump sugar is preferred. This is broken into small pieces with special pincers for the purpose, the lump is put into the mouth and the unsweetened tea consumed slowly. Bread and butter, too, are provided. This is the time for conversation, and countless cups of tea and stacks of bread often disappear as whole hours slip by in this pleasant national diversion. At the end of the meal it is the invariable

demand of courtesy that we should thank our host and hostess for the food.

*In the Barnyard*

Let us now have a look at the outbuildings. The granaries are, if possible, built of logs carefully joined with bins on either side of the room for the grains which will vary with the section of the country. It has from time immemorial been the ideal of the peasant to keep on hand a good supply of bread, as both the grain and the prepared loaf are called. The good farmer will never see the bottom of his bin. The horses and other stock are stabled in buildings of either mud brick or willow basketwork plastered with clay. In general, more attention is given to warmth and shelter than to ventilation and light in the stables as well as in the house. The stalls are not cleaned with the regularity expected of a good farmer in America, but care is taken to save the manure for fuel. The medium class farmer of the south will have a pair of horses, at least, a cow, a few sheep, and perhaps a half dozen pigs. As we shall see later, the classification of peasants into wealth categories is purely a matter of local comparison and differs widely in different sections of the country.

Under the sheds of the courtyard will be found the farming implements and means of conveyance. Here are plow, harrow, seeder, grain cleaner and reaper. The usual summer means of conveyance is the one-horse springless road-wagon built with narrow running gear and a flaring bed that extends over the wheels and is supported by an iron brace resting on the end of the axle. The shafts are fastened independently to the front axle, which makes necessary the queer bow over



the collar in harnessing the horse, which is used as a spring to keep the collar and shafts from pressing against the neck of the animal. In the greater part of Russia, the sleigh is the exclusive means of winter transportation. The usual form is a simple pair of village-made runners surmounted by a wedge-shaped frame which acts as an outrigger in the rear spread to prevent overturning. A well-to-do farmer may own a vehicle with springs for summer service, and even a light sleigh of the kind we know in America. But most of them are accustomed to consider the freight carrying value of their conveyance rather than its comfort, and depend on a liberal amount of hay or straw for the cushioning of the passenger.

The bath house will be located as conveniently as possible to the water supply. If the courtyard borders the river, it will, of course, be at the rear of the quadrangle. On account of the scarcity of fuel, several families may share a bath house. But every Russian considers it practically a religious duty to have his Saturday bath and will often go great distances for this luxury, if he does not possess a bath of his own. The principle of the bath is very simple: Some means of heating a small, low ceilinged room to the highest degree bearable for human beings, filling this purgatory with steam and vapor by throwing water over hot stones or pieces of iron; two or three tiers of ascending steps whereon the devotee may sit or recline, and a tub of hot and one of cold water. The event of the bath is more than a mere cleansing process. It is a ceremony in which the devotee luxuriates in prolonged steaming while a friend or member of the family beats his broiling body with a bunch of birch twigs, or, failing this assistance, he climbs to the topmost tier and sweats himself

to the point of collapse. Here, as in the washing of the hands, the water is always poured over the body, hot water first, and after the broiling a dash of cold. I remember very well how on my first acquaintance with such a bath in a little village of Samara Government, I quickly sought refuge like a good soldier by lying flat on the floor. One of the women workers of the Quaker Unit was carried out of another bath of the same sort in a dead faint. I was reared on a Kentucky farm, and I am ready to testify that for the cleansing power, the village bath is far more effective than the washtub on Saturday night.

All of the foregoing concerns a middle class farmer in the southern grain country. In the same town of Maslov Kut there are also many houses of the poor, with one clay-floored room, one horse or none, and practically no implements. On the other hand, one of the richer families owns a tractor, three horses, two cows, and twenty sheep. Figures for 4,636 families, secured from the county statistical bureau of Archangelskoe county, in which this village is located, reveal the following distribution of horses, which is the best comparative index of peasant wealth: 1,845, without horses; 669, one horse; 1,107, two horses; 539, three; 476, four or more. On the other hand, in a small village of forty houses which I visited in Leningrad Gubernia, one horse to the family is the general rule, and I was told by an informed official of the district that throughout the entire section the man with two horses is the rich exception. This is also true of the central agricultural districts of the heavily populated country around Moscow. But a visitor from Siberia informs me that the middle farmer of that section owns two pairs of oxen and two or three horses.

## NORTH AND SOUTH

In outward appearance, the village of the north differs essentially in the fact that it is built of logs, and covered with shingles or boards. The principle of the one long street remains. The houses still invariably turn their gables to the front and are decorated elaborately with jig-saw work. The barn is attached to the house, and frequently has a door leading directly from the family quarters for convenience in the winter and for the better protection of the stock. Wood is plentiful and manure is carefully saved for fertilizing the land. Wooden fences replace the clay walls of the south, and the absence of the enclosed court arrangement of the south is at once noted. The granaries and outhouses are placed more casually about the lot, like a farm yard of America. The smaller settlements are frequently set in clearings of the forest, and all of the country abounds in pine and birch, which offers a picturesque setting for the northern village, lacking in the south. Also unlike the steppe, stone is available for buildings and for roads. But the dress and customs and general life do not differ greatly from the south.

The charm of the steppe country lies in its distances, its ever changing summer carpets of wildflowers, and the glistening waves of snow in winter. A village seen from afar in such a setting, with its church domes rising above the thatched roofs and flocks of fleecy clouds suspended in the vast dome of blue above, is a scene not soon forgotten, and it calls the wanderer back in spite of muddy streets and primitive ways of life. On the other hand, the north country lures by the intimacy of the landscape in which the villages are set. Forests coming to the very door, trees that pierce the sky with

their straight green shafts, and friendly streams that ripple unmuddied through the meadows. The dwellers of the wooded country can scarcely endure the plains and yearn for their friendly trees.

#### COMMUNICATION

A word must be said here concerning roads in Russia and general inter-village communication. A glance at any good map of the country will reveal the enormous stretches untouched by railway lines. And this in turn accounts in part for the very poor distribution of population over the arable land, as will be noted in the next chapter. Here, as in the United States and Canada, the settlers have always been lured by the railways into the great uncultivated sections. Roads, in the sense in which we are accustomed to think of them, may be said not to exist in the steppe country of the south. Stone is entirely out of the question for hard roads, and road grading is an unknown art, even in the narrow confines of the village, to say nothing of the great stretches between. The trails across the steppe are practically impassable for weeks in the spring and fall. The stranger must always have a guide when making a journey to a village whose church domes are not in sight, and even old residents of a community are often lost in the mazes of tracks when they wander too far afield. In winter the trails are marked by sunflower stalks or bushes as guides to the wayfarer when snow obliterates the sled tracks. But the memory of one dramatic night spent on the steppe in a blizzard, and another lost road in the Bashkir country with a friendly German village to harbor us, persuades me that even these aids are not unfailingly effective.

The chief effort at facilitating travel is spent in the building and maintenance of bridges. This is the business of each county or township, and consequently bridges vary in frequency and quality. Many are of the type a facetious relief worker used to call "hit or miss"—very well if you hit them, tragic if you drive a bit too far to right or left. On the other hand, strong, well-built wooden bridges may be found in most remote sections of the country. Most of the grain and heavy hauling of other sorts is done in the winter in the frozen parts of the country.

Postal service, naturally, depends to a great degree upon transportation facilities. But in spite of this handicap the service is being greatly enlarged and extended. In one village of the Leningrad Gubernia sixteen miles from the railway, I was told that before the Revolution the mail came every now and then, when it was convenient, perhaps once a month. A regular twice-a-week postal service is now provided.

Telephones in the congested village are not nearly so important as they are to our isolated farmers, and, as yet, even few of the villages are connected with each other by telephone. It is the ideal of the Government to have all county and township centers available by telephone, but even this object has by no means yet been reached, and the vast majority of Russian farmers are isolated by miles of bad roads from adequate medical aid and general touch with the outside world. Contrast this with the results of the survey of ten thousand farm homes made by the Federal Department of Agriculture in 1919 which show that 72 percent of American farm homes in average communities have telephones.

This is, in a stroke, the village the camera will find. Quaintly picturesque, but primitive and lacking in

many of the conveniences which the western world regards as the elemental marks of progress. With very few exceptions the same village a visitor of a hundred years ago saw on his journeys. This is the village with all its inertia and traditions, inherited by the Revolution. But let us not fail to see the town because there are so many houses. The greatest of changes may hide themselves behind ancient architecture, or even an antique hair-cut.

## CHAPTER III

### LAND

#### THE INHERITANCE

THE peasant, as we have pointed out, brought out of even the period of slavery the firm belief that the land belonged to him. The Peasants' Union of 1905 gave voice to the explicit demand of "All the land for those that labor on it." The Bolsheviki came into power on a battle cry of "Land, Peace, and Bread." But the comparative ease with which the socialization of the land was put into effect is traceable to the peculiar system of land tenure which grew out of the period of serfdom and persisted with little significant change down to the Revolution. Indeed, it became the basis of the present forms of land usage.

During the slave period of two hundred and fifty years, the system became prevalent all over Russia of apportioning to the serf village a part of the master's estate which was regarded as sufficient to provide food for itself. Gradually it became the accepted custom for the serf to spend half his time in the cultivation of his own land and half in free service to his master. According to one historian, the Czar Paul "expressed the pious opinion" that this was enough to expect of the serf, and since opinions of Czars were the will of their subjects, this came to be regarded as a law. The land thus allotted to the peasants was never considered as

individual shares. All the land was the share of the entire village and was distributed in accordance with the decisions of the village *mir*, or council. It will be necessary to give further attention to this ancient democratic institution in considering the present political system of the village. It is sufficient to note here that the village assembly, composed of all the heads of the households, divided the land according to the needs of the families, with every effort to see that a fair division was made both in quantity and quality. The crop rotation was a simple three field system: winter grain, spring grain, and fallow. This meant that each household had a strip of land in each of the sections laid out by the village for the purposes named. But more than this, there being a difference in the quality of the land, this was often subdivided several times in the interests of fairness, so that a family might cultivate a dozen strips in widely separated places, each about the size of a pocket handkerchief. The cattle were pastured on a common plot set aside for that purpose, and each house had its own garden plot.

With the coming of the Emancipation, provision was made that the villages whose householders, now become free men with the rights of citizens, should receive approximately the same amount of land which had been allotted to them under serfdom. This land was by no means given to the village. True, the village could not be deprived of its share, but the land was still the property of the landowner, and the commune as a whole was responsible for a yearly payment of rent to the master. They might meet this obligation in money or in work on the remaining land of the former master. Further provision was made for those landlords who needed cash and wished to be relieved of the nuisance



of collecting rent, whereby the government paid the owner at once four-fifths of the value of the land, and transferred the debt to the commune. The commune then repaid the government at the rate of six percent a year for forty-nine years, and was also expected to pay the remaining fifth to the landlord at once or in small payments. Little wonder that the peasants regarded this widely heralded freedom as a hollow blessing! Not only did they not receive more land, but were actually compelled to pay for their own communal holdings which they had regarded as their own from time immemorial.

As far as the individual tenure of village land was concerned, this reform not only effected no change, but actually bound the peasant tighter to the social unit. For now the whole village was responsible for taxes and for the payment of the land rent. The system of distribution continued the same. Every household was compelled to take its share of the land, which was a blessing or a curse, according to its quality. A share of land was rarely sufficiently productive to pay the rent and taxes, so that the peasants were compelled to work for the landlord just as before, or to move to the cities and work in the newly developing factories to send money home for their "redemption dues," as the payment on the land was styled. The arrangement proved, on the whole, unsatisfactory to both parties in the end. The landlord claimed that the peasants were lazy, drunken, and dishonest. With these excuses he took advantage of the continued economic dependence of his tenant to drive impossible bargains for labor, and cried out for legislation when the peasant naturally did everything he could to sabotage on such contracts.

Wallace tells at great length how the law which thus

still bound the peasant to the land was consciously devised to ward off the great bogey of "the proletariat" that was just beginning to show its head in the manufacturing centers of the west by giving every peasant a root in the soil. But these measures did not secure the welfare or loyalty of the peasantry. In 1881, the villages which had not already exercised the privilege of buying their holdings which had been granted by the first Emancipation Act of 1861, were compelled by law to redeem their land. The village holdings, originally too small, grew less adequate as the population increased. The peasant land bank, founded in the same year (1881), soon began to limit its loans to the richer peasants, and the lot of the average villager grew steadily worse, until the crop failure of 1891 plunged millions of the impoverished farmers of twenty provinces into a terrible famine.

The following figures compiled by the League for Agrarian Reform illustrate the distribution of land ownership in fifty provinces of European Russia in 1905. The figures are given in dessiatines, a land measure equal to 2.7 acres.

Crown and Appanage .....	145,229,000
Church .....	2,611,000
Other Government Departments .....	6,148,000
Nobility .....	53,169,000
Peasant farmers, privately owned ...	24,597,000
Other private owners .....	23,968,000
Village Communal Shares .....	138,767,000

To which a note is added that the government lands were largely forest. With allowance for this, it will be seen that although the richer peasants had begun to acquire lands purchased from the landlords, practically

half of all the arable land of the country was still in the hands of the church, State, and landlords.

But this does not give the complete picture. The following table quoted by Smirnov,\* Commissar of Agriculture, reveals the fact that even this poorer half of the land of the country belonging to the peasantry was very unevenly divided. (The figures here are also for European Russia and in dessiatines from the land census of 1905):

Size of Individual Holdings	No. House-holds	Percent People	No. Des.	Percent Land
1 to 4 Dessiatines	1,928,000	15.7	4,822,000	3.6
4 " 8 "	4,248,000	34.6	25,915,000	19.0
8 " 20 "	4,807,000	39.2	57,230,000	41.7
20 " 50 "	1,062,000	8.6	30,899,000	22.6
50 " 100 "	192,000	1.6	12,159,000	8.9
More than 100 Des.	41,000	0.3	5,762,000	4.2
	12,278,000		136,887,000	

Thus we see that while the average was more than eleven dessiatines per family, more than fifty percent of the population cultivated less than eight dessiatines per family. When it is remembered that the average rural family consists of at least six members, the pitiful inadequacy of fifteen or twenty acres for general farming purposes is evident.

Following the revolutionary activities of 1905 with its peasant uprisings, many landowners were not only glad but anxious to dispose of their property. Again the government came to their aid and purchased their holdings at very inflated prices, offering the land for sale to

\* A. P. Smirnov, brochure, *Our Fundamental Problems in the Improvement and Organization of Peasant Economy*, p. 8, *Novaya Derevnya*, 1925.

the peasants through the Peasants' Bank. At the same time peasants were given the right to leave the village commune and to claim as personal property their share of the communal land. This measure drafted by Stoly-pin was another move designed to make of the growingly revolutionary peasant a conservative petty landlord. But coming as it did in company with the arrest of thousands of peasants who had taken part in the risings of 1905, this reform made comparatively little impression on the villages.

Consequently, at the time the Soviets assumed power they found some such situation as this. A very small number of the peasant farmers had grown comparatively rich, and in addition to their share in the village land had purchased more from the landlords. A few had taken advantage of the law permitting them to withdraw from the village commune and had gone out to the land and established farms after the style of American farmers. But the vast majority remained poor members of essentially the same type of village commune which had existed a hundred years before, still land hungry, burdened with taxes and debt, still compelled by economic pressure to work for the landlords for a pittance. For example, prior to the war, women day-laborers in the fields received ten cents a day, men not more than twenty-five cents, with food of the coarsest kind. This amount was about doubled during the war period, accompanying the general inflation, but actual wages were no more than before.

#### THE SOVIET PLAN

The land program of the Bolsheviks was essentially that of the Socialist Revolutionaries who were the his-

toric leaders of the peasantry. This program, first published in *Izvestia* in June 1917, adopted by the Congress of Workmen, Soldiers and Peasants' Deputies, November 9, and confirmed later by the Peasants' Congress on November 16, 1917, provides, fundamentally, for the nationalization of all lands. By these first provisions, land could not be "bought, sold, rented, given as security, or expropriated by any means whatever." And further, (Paragraph 6) "The right to enjoy the land is accorded, without distinction of sex, to all citizens of the State who wish to work the land either with their own families or in other forms of association, and only as long as they are capable of working. Hiring of labor is prohibited."

As a matter of fact the peasants had already begun to take over the land in many parts of the country before the formulation of new laws. Landlords had fled, were casually dropped into a convenient well, or otherwise disposed of if they had been particularly hated. The newly formed government hastened to send instructions to the villages concerning the formation of land committees in every township and village, and accompanied them with emissaries from the center to the provinces to investigate and control the land situation. The whole tendency was to throw the actual distribution and control of the land back on the local community. It can be imagined that in the scramble which followed the confused days of 1917 these newly formed land committees did not at first function with perfect smoothness. And as late as October, 1926, the Commissar of Agriculture complained in the pages of *Agricultural Life* that nearly one million cases of land disputes had been in the courts of the Soviet Union during the preceding year. The first simple brief decree of 1917 was

expanded in September, 1918 into a Land Law of fifty-three articles, and by 1926 had grown by amendment and enlargement of two hundred and twenty-one sections. Let us see how the peasant is practically affected by the new decrees and legislation.

*The Farmer's Calendar*, published by the Department of Agriculture Press, summarizes as follows:

"What the October Revolution Gave the Farmers.

Fifty million dessiatines of new land from landlords, church, and state. Nearly 50 million dessiatines from rich peasants redistributed among the poor.

A total land value of 13 billion 400 million roubles, estimated at the medium pre-war values of land.

Freedom from one billion 400 million roubles of land debt.

One hundred million roubles worth of various property and farm equipment from the old estates. Two hundred and fifty million roubles worth of livestock from the old estates.

A vast sum of yearly rents paid to landlords.

Freedom from government loans of the Czar: Foreign, 9 billion 100 million roubles; domestic capitalists, 12 billion 900 million roubles.

A grand total of nearly 31 billion roubles.\*

Thus the new land from old estates alone, equally divided among the twenty million peasant households of the Union, should have added an average of about

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\* Figures quoted by *Farmer's Calendar* from Teodorovich, *Lessons of the Union of Workers and Peasants*.

six acres to each family. But such a simple process was, of course, impossible. Each village could only redivide its former holdings, plus whatever new acquisitions it gained, among the population of the village. The permanent solution of the land shortage in certain sections must wait on the slower process of transplanting to the new lands of Siberia and the Southeast. For while the average density of population of the Union as a whole is about  $10\frac{1}{2}$  to the square mile, the range is all the way from 89 per square mile in the Ukraine to less than  $1\frac{1}{2}$  in Siberia.\* Compared with this, rural New England in 1919 was 16, the Mid-Atlantic states, 56.†

The larger and more highly developed estates were taken over by the government from the beginning and operated as Soviet Farms. The acreage thus set aside composed about three percent of the total land of the old estates. Many of the smaller holdings were granted to communes which sprang up thickly immediately after the Revolution. A certain portion was retained as reserve government land. The balance was divided among the households of the villages in various manners. I remember the opening of a new section of an old estate near a village of Samara Gubernia in 1922. The land was divided into equal sections for each of the wards or "hundreds" of the village, and the representatives of these groups chose lots for the strips by taking hold of a rope which had been laid on the ground, and then counting off in the order in which they had found a place. The larger plots were then similarly subdivided among the households of the ward in accordance with the number of souls in the family.

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\* *All U. S. S. R.*, a year book for 1924-1925, p. 13.

† Gillette, *Rural Sociology*, Macmillan, 1925.

A brief survey of Archangelskoe County of Terski District in the North Caucasus, made by members of the Russian Reconstruction Farms in 1925, assembled a number of interesting facts about this district, which, as has been said, is an average area of the well-to-do southeastern grain country. Ninety-three percent of the land is at present in the hands of the peasants; three percent, Soviet Farms; four percent, undivided government land. On the usual basis of division according to the number of souls or "eaters," the average of the county is  $10\frac{1}{2}$  acres per person.

The village system of life and the surviving practice of the communal distribution of land greatly simplified the process of nationalization, and, as we shall see, also makes easier many social projects, but the wasteful and inconvenient method of agriculture involved in living great distances from the fields under cultivation is an outstanding defect of the system. Efforts are being made to meet this problem by the settlement of small collective groups directly on the land, as will be treated in greater length in the next chapter. But this is a slow process, and has thus far made little impression on the ancient evil of this system. The land committees, like their predecessors the village mir, try to be extremely democratic and fair in the distributions. Consequently, not only must the land be divided in accordance with its fertility, but also according to its distance from the village. Great flexibility is permitted, however, so that by mutually agreeable exchanges, most of the evils of the many strip plan of the old system have been eliminated. Many cases can also be found of families like one I visited in the Leningrad Gubernia where five desiatines instead of the regular share of nine had been



taken for the privilege of having it all together and near the village. Still, as a general rule, every family will have at least two pieces of land for cultivation, one near the village and a second more distant. A writer in *Agricultural Life* quotes statistics showing that one peasant operating on the old three field system with a number of separated plots travelled 1,266 miles in the course of one season going to and from his fields. The same author shows that in the Volga district and the southeast, only 12 percent have land as near as within two miles of the village; in the Central Black soil district, 54 percent; but in the northwest district, 96 percent. Nearly 30 percent of the Volga district has part of its land more than seven miles from home. We found the largest village of Archangelskoe county to have land as far as sixteen miles distant.

#### IN THE FIELD

Under such circumstances, the farmer does the only practical thing: migrates to the land for the working season. Practically the entire family, with the exception of the old folk who are left to keep the house, moves to a roughly constructed shelter in the open field. These tabernacles are frequently made by leaning sticks together to form a wedge shaped frame which is thatched with grass or straw. Sometimes a cellar is dug under this shelter to provide a cool retreat from the torrid heat, which, contrary to most ideas about Russia, is almost unbearable in the middle of the day during the summer. An outdoor stove and even an oven is built. Nearby the horses can surely be found. The cow, and even the chickens and geese may be brought out to feed on the fields under the watchful eye of younger children. Those having land nearer the

village, but still too far to work comfortably from the home base, take bread for a week at a time and either go in or have members of the family replenish the stock of food and water from time to time. Water is one of the most serious needs of the steppe country, and often has to be hauled many miles for the use of both man and beast.

The whole family is up and at work with the dawn and often toils even by moonlight during the harvest season. But in the middle of the day everyone lies down in the shade of a wagon or in the pavilion and sleeps for an hour or two after dinner. Women take their places beside the men in the fields at even the hardest work, and in the hiring of workers are often preferred to men. Peasants are undoubtedly lazy, according to our standards of sustained labor, but the amount of genuinely hard work they can do on a diet of little more than black bread and tea is often amazing.

The farm implements of the rich southeast are generally better than those of any other part of Russia I have visited. The German Mennonite villages of the district claim to have introduced into the neighborhood better steel plows, particularly of the two bottom type. However that may be, such plows requiring four to six horses can frequently be found in that section, and the wooden one horse affair of the North is never seen. Camels are widely used as draught animals in the Southeast and in the lower Volga districts, particularly since the devastations of war and famine. Oxen are regarded as the most satisfactory work animals, particularly for the heavier work of ploughing, and are still used in great numbers even on some of the Soviet Farms. The first tractor came to Archangelskoe county in 1924. In the summer of 1926 there were thirty-eight, exclu-

sive of the nineteen belonging to the American company operating a Soviet Farm in the county.

Generally speaking, the country is still greatly handicapped by the lack of horses. According to the Control Figures of Gosplan for 1926, (a contraction of the words meaning Government and Plans) there were over thirty-five million horses in the Union in 1916. By 1922 after the losses of war, revolution, and famine, this number had shrunk to nineteen million. According to the same tables, this number has now increased to more than twenty-eight million, but this is still far below the pre-war level and is but three million more than the number of horses and mules used by half the same number of farmers in America. The widespread use of oxen in certain sections helps to lessen the difference, but the need is still keenly felt. It is not at all unusual even yet to see milk cows used for drawing burdens, and horses are invariably used for work when they are too young.

The most striking lack of farm equipment at once apparent to the American observer is in the field of the more complicated harvesting and threshing machinery. In Archangelskoe county, a representative section of a rich area devoted almost exclusively to wheat growing, we found, according to local statistics for the eight thousand families of the county, but 158 binders, 219 seeders, and 43 threshing machines. Most of the reaping is done with 1,031 old-fashioned reapers, and the grain is bound by hand. The majority of the peasants thresh by the ancient method of beating out the grain with a horse-drawn corrugated stone roller. The grain is then carefully swept up from the threshing floor and cleaned by passing it through a hand operated fanning machine. The whole operation is performed in the fields

during the dry hot days of August. A family with the aid of one horse can thresh about twenty-four bushels a day by this method. An additional horse may run the average as high as sixty bushels. But I have watched a small American thresher with a tractor for motor power and a crew of six or seven peasants work through a season with a daily output of 780 bushels. In Samara Gubernia, another of the great grain producing states, I have passed, in the course of a short morning's journey, families beating out the grain with a flail, others using horses in the manner described, and still a third group using a modern threshing machine.

Agriculture in the north is, generally speaking, more difficult and more primitive. The soil is poorer and demands a plentiful supply of manure. It is often stony, and marshes abound. Unlike the dry steppe of the south, too much rainfall is the usual problem. As I have indicated before, one horse is the standard family power unit. Light steel plows of Russian make are gradually taking the place of the old wooden scratching devices made by the village master, but these latter can still be found at work. Grain is frequently cut by hand, and almost always needs to be dried by some artificial means before it can be beaten out with the flail on the threshing floor of the barn. Wheat is practically not raised at all in this section. The grain crops are rye, barley, and oats. Wheat flour is unknown in the average family except two or three times a year on the great holidays.

The table on the following page, taken from the All U. S. S. R. year book for 1925-26, shows the distribution of crops in 1923, which may be taken as a general picture of the country today:

For All U. S. S. R. to 100 dessiatines sown:

	Percent		Percent
Winter rye	34.4	Beans, peas, etc.	0.2
"    wheat	5.6	Flax	1.2
Spring rye	0.3	Hemp	0.5
"    wheat	13.3	Potatoes	3.2
"    oats	13.4	Sugar beets	0.4
Barley	8.7	Sunflowers	3.4
Buckwheat	3.2	Forage crops	1.3
Millet (edible grain)	7.6	Other crops	1.1
Corn	7.6		
<hr/>		<hr/>	
Total Grain	88.7	Total intensive	11.3

It is seen at once that the grain crops comprise the great bulk of the agricultural products of the country. But great emphasis has been placed by the Department of Agriculture upon the cultivation of technical crops within the last few years, and the increased development of industry demands still greater quantities of such products. Substantial loans are advanced by the government trusts dealing in the various crops for experiments on a basis of so much per acre. Agricultural journals make much of intensive farming and its value has been proved in many sections of the country. Vineyards are very profitable in the sections of the south where their cultivation is possible, and in the Leningrad Gubernia I visited a peasant who paid the second highest tax of the village and made a comparatively comfortable living on ten acres of grain and pasture and a half acre devoted to orchard, berries, and bees.

Bread, however, in the ordinary general farming of the most of Russia, is the norm of prosperity. If there is bread enough for the family the year round and some

very simple clothing, all is well. But even with the additional land of the revolutionary gain, the poor land of the north is not sufficient to provide this minimum, and where there is no extra work to be had in the neighborhood, such as cutting wood in the forests, thousands of men and women flee to the cities in search of jobs. The Leningrad *Pravda* for November 21, 1926 reported 164,000 persons registered as unemployed, of whom 24.5 percent were from the village. A whole column on the front page of the Moscow *Pravda* of November 10, 1926, dealing with the same problem, said in part, "So long as the village will send to the city all her new increments of workers who have not found work, it is useless to think of significant gain in the fight against unemployment." The author proposed the organization of small industries such as canneries, cheese factories, brick factories, and so on, to use the surplus labor in the village, and also suggested that the farmers learn to use their time more valuably about the farm in the winter.

The women usually manage to keep busy the year round, working in the fields in the summer along with the men, and spending the winter in knitting, spinning, and sewing. But the majority of the men keep close to the stove and engage in Russia's great indoor sport, talk. Only a comparatively small percentage of the male population finds profitable home industry for the winter.

#### PLIABLE LAND LAWS

Before leaving this discussion of the general usage of the land, some attention must be given to significant changes which have been made in the fundamental land law. The provision of the first decree regarding rental

was repeated categorically in the Land Codex of 1918, Par. 45, "The right to use the land is not transferrable." But it was soon found that for many reasons, chief among them the lack of work animals, millions of families were unable to cultivate the share allotted to them. The provisions of the law which undertook the social cultivation of the land in such cases did not prove practical. All kinds of illegal renting grew up.

In 1922 the law was revised to permit the renting of land for a period of not more than one complete crop rotation, that is, three years in the case of a three field system, four for a four field system, and so on. But the law provided that the rented land could be worked only by the renter. The hiring of labor was still forbidden. Even this increased liberty did not bring the results so ardently desired by the government—the cultivation of every possible dessiatine of soil. Nor did it bring relief to the mass of poor families which were absolutely without means to cultivate their holdings. As late as 1923\* more than thirty percent of the households of the Union were absolutely without horses, and more than nineteen percent without animals of any kind. So, in February, 1926, the law was further enlarged to permit the rental of land for as long as two crop rotations, varying with the field system used as in the previous amendment. But, more than this, the Council of Peoples Commissars sanctioned the employment of hired labor on such rented land under certain restrictions.

The law at present provides that rental contracts must be registered with the local authorities. All obligations attached to the land, such as taxes, are assumed by the renter. The working members of the renter's

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\* Smirnov, *Our Fundamental Problems*, p. 21.

family must work on the rented land, though they may hire labor to assist them. If at the end of the maximum rental period the family to whom the land is regularly assigned is still unable to cultivate it themselves, the share is made a part of the reserve land of the village and is redivided among the households needing it.

(Paragraph 29) Land may be rented (Paragraph 28) in any of the following instances: (a) when the economy is temporarily weak following elemental calamities such as crop failure, fire, lack of animals; (b) when there is lack of farming implements; (c) in the event of the death of one of the working members of the family; (d) in the event of the mobilization of a son by the Red Army, and this causes a lack of sufficient working power on the land; (e) if a working member of the family has been chosen for special work of some sort; (f) in case of the temporary absence of the holder of the land at some other work. Sub-rental is prohibited.

The ordinary terms of rental are on the basis of crop division, one half to the renter and one half to the holder. In the North Caucasus there were also great tracts of government land for rent at the rate of one rouble per dessiatine for pasturage purposes and two roubles for agricultural purposes. This land is a long way from the village, however, and is not supplied with water. In the village of Maslov Kut we found in 1925 that out of the total village land of 29,135 acres, 2,662 acres were rented to 218 renters. In many cases these rented portions belong to widows, and to the very poor who have no means of cultivation. In the Leningrad district I have had numbers of vacant village cottages pointed out to me which are occupied for only a few weeks of the summer by the owners who have gone off to the city to work and have rented their land.



A limited privilege of hiring labor on the land was extended in 1925. Agreements are made for a period of not more than one year, and cover the nature of the work, period of labor, working hours, amount and conditions of payment. Payment is determined by local conditions, and may not be less than the lowest category as determined by local labor authorities. If a higher wage is agreed upon, the employer must abide by his agreement. The basic hours of labor are eight, but this may be indefinitely extended by mutual agreement during the harvest season, in which case payment must be made for overtime. Children younger than fourteen may not be employed in regular farm labor, and women may not be used for the heavier farm work. Children as young as twelve years, however, may be employed in exceptionally easy work which is not injurious to their health. Provision is made that the employer shall give board and lodging to the laborer during illness incurred in the pursuit of his work, and must hold his position open for him from two weeks to one month in accordance with the length of time he has previously worked. Most regular farm laborers are members of the Union of Land and Forest Workers. If an employer uses at one time more than two laborers, he must pay social insurance for them. Furthermore, as has been implied in the conditions for the rental of land, the employer and his family must work alongside his laborers.

The Russian-American operated Government Farm of the village of Maslov Kut is a large employer of farm labor. During the summer season, hundreds of men and women are hired for work in the fields and vineyards. Most of these workers are members of the union, and as in the case of all employers using more than fifty laborers, the union maintains a local secretary whose

business it is to guard the interests of the workers. The usual rate paid for day labor on the Farms is from thirty-three to forty-six cents a day for women and fifty to seventy-five cents a day for men. Such workers make as high as a dollar or a dollar and a half a day during the overtime in the harvests. But if employed by the month an unskilled worker is paid nine or ten dollars, and maintains himself. The customary wage of a carpenter, mason, or other such skilled workman in the village is from a dollar to a dollar and a half a day.

The Commissar of Agriculture, discussing the prevalence of land disputes in the courts in *Agricultural Life* for October 28, 1926, points out that of the million cases tried during the past year, most of them fall under the following heads: (1) Rare cases of violation of the law concerning the nationalization of the land in the matters of sale, exchange, and inheritance; (2) Cases of sub-rental of land or its cultivation exclusively with hired labor; (3) Concealed renting of land and the hiring of children below the age limit; (4) Cultivation of land earlier than permitted by the land laws, particularly the misuse of meadows; (5) Violations of the land rights of those called to the Red Army or other legitimate service away from the village; (6) Violation of land rights and privileges with respect to the use of land set aside by the soviet power for the poor fund. The Commissar lays these infractions of the law to ignorance on the part of the villagers and calls upon the Communist organizations of the village to be more zealous in their educational work.

#### THE KULAK

The great bogey man of the village who has been flung on the billboards in posters as the destroying worm

in the fields of the farmer, who figures largely in all the journals and newspapers of Russia, and is a never-failing source of oratory, is the *Kulak*. The term is an old one, meaning literally, "fist," and was used long before the Revolution to designate the rich exploiting village farmer who took advantage of his neighbors' needs to line his own pockets. He was a small money-lender. He loaned seed at high rates of interest. He often speculated in land, and did all kinds of petty trading. He himself did little work on his own land, but worked it exclusively by hired labor. As has already been pointed out in the summary of gains made by the village in the Revolution, this class of exploiter had almost as much land taken from him and divided among his poorer neighbors as that taken from the great landlords. But unlike the landlords, this group remained, and with the increasing opportunities offered by the New Economic Policy and the widening privileges of rental and the hiring of labor, began to grow again comparatively rich. This danger had been foreseen from the beginning by the Bolsheviki, and they have gone continually to the poor peasant, the proletariat of the village, to form with them and the middle peasant a bloc against the kulak.

The first process of the Revolution was one of leveling. This was comparatively simple. But the present program for raising the general level of the village without disturbing this new status of equality, has proved a far more delicate task. Trotsky, who has seen the danger in more somber hues, it must be said, than most of his fellow workers, declared in a speech at Kislovodsk while on a vacation in December, 1925, that, "The worker in the city, though he may receive higher wages than others, remains a worker. But in the village a peas-

ant becoming richer, becomes a kulak, and social differentiation is brought into the village."

But the difficulty with this campaign was that it turned loose a term of opprobrium which soon ran wild. Hard-working, intelligent peasants, who purely by their own efforts began to acquire more wealth than their lazy or improvident neighbors, were branded as kulaks. This became more ridiculous in the face of the general poverty of the villages and the wide variance between the standards of wealth in different sections of the country, as has been pointed out. Smirnov, in the brochure already quoted published in 1925, dwells on this danger at length in his preface. He points out the necessity of distinguishing between two groups of strong, well-to-do farmers. "The first group—the pure usurer, engaged in the exploitation of weaker groups, not only in the process of production by the use of hired labor, but particularly by the means of every kind of enslaving bargain, by petty village trade and friendly credit with holy percent. The farmer of this group is least of all interested in the conduct of his own agriculture, and all his free capital is directed in the path of pure usury.

"The second type of well-to-do group consists of the strong, hard-working farmer, striving his utmost to strengthen and increase his production, investing his free means particularly in the capital of his farm in the form of livestock and equipment, better seed, and so on. The use of hired labor in such an economy, if it has a place, is preeminently of a temporary character, and is required by causes which can in no way be given as reasons for counting such a farmer in the group of kulaks.

"With this first group, the group of kulak farmers,

we must carry on the most decisive conflict by means of the policy of taxes, by the prohibition of enslaving arrangements, by the strong enforcement of the labor code, by the organization of cheaper credit for the weaker section of the village, and so on. "On the other hand, the second group, the group of strong, hard-working farmers, we must uphold in every way, using their capital as a means of contributing to the development of agricultural cooperation and for the business of strengthening and raising the economic standard of agriculture as a whole."

Rykof in his speech before the Fifteenth Party Conference in Moscow, on October 20, 1926, adduces figures from the most recent material of the Central Statistical Bureau to show that the gradual trend, using the seeded acreage as the norm, has been toward a strengthening of this middle class economy, the raising of the level of the poor peasant, and that there has been only a small normal increase in the upper categories.

As a whole, the countryside presents a picture of a vast agricultural area, in many respects centuries behind in farming methods and further handicapped by the devastations of war and famine. Into this composition is thrust the most widespread experiment in socialism in the history of the world. For the most part the millions of peasant households move on in much the same fashion in which they have operated for centuries. But here and there, in increasing numbers, new methods of agriculture, new modes of social and economic cohesion, stand out as the result of this new infusion. Chief among these are the various types of cooperative agriculture, the Soviet Farms and the role played by heavier machinery, particularly the tractor.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE TRACTOR AND COLLECTIVE AGRICULTURE

#### THE COMMUNE

It has already been noted that in the process of nationalizing the land, certain of the old estates were taken over in part or as a whole, to be operated as government farms, on much the same basis as the factories were nationalized. As the same time, hundreds of the smaller farms were assigned to groups of workers who organized themselves into communes. This movement had a phenomenal growth for the first year or so. Its devotees were encouraged, no doubt, by the prospect of receiving large tracts of some of the best land of the country, houses, machinery, and often numbers of farm animals. Statistics of the League for Agrarian Reform show that the number of communes grew from 950 in December, 1918 to 2,097 in July, 1919.

The head of the most successful commune I knew in the Samara Gubernia in 1922 loved to call himself a *communar*, one who "practices" communism in contrast to many who simply theorize about it. The earliest of these organizations were designed on the most thorough-going plan of equal sharing. All property was held in common. Work was performed according to the ability and skill of the worker, and all income was added to the common store, from which each member of the group

was provided with his needs. All ate together at the communal table and every step of the organization from the amount of salt needed in the soup to the building of a mill was discussed in mass meetings. The children were housed in common dormitories and cared for by members of the group assigned to this task. Most of this description needs now to be written in the past tense. For though some two thousand agricultural groups continue to be listed as communes, most of them will be found to have considerably amended their programs. For example, an American visiting a large and successful commune whose members were recruited principally from American Finns, informs me that while the communal dining room is maintained, a careful check is kept of all labor performed, and profits are divided on this basis as well as on that of primary investment. The group is further seriously considering the advisability of adopting a regular salary basis for labor.

Most of the communes were, naturally, formed by members of the Communist Party, or at least by ardent sympathizers. But there were also a number of religious groups which took advantage of the new opportunities furnished by the Revolution to practice their views of Christian brotherhood. In the spring of 1926 I visited a commune in the Tver Gubernia which had been formed by a group of Evangelicals four years before and was still operating on a genuine communal basis. This group, which now numbers about one hundred, occupies the buildings and land of a former private estate of three hundred acres of arable land and a quantity of forest. This estate had been first administered as a government farm after the Revolution. A part of the equipment, consisting of mower, reaper, threshing machine, and small implements, was received

with the estate. No rent is paid for the land or equipment, and the total tax of three hundred and seventy three roubles paid in 1925 was lowered twenty-five percent as a special allowance for land improvement. The group has built an oil press and established a tannery and boot shop. They have their own smithy, and grind their own rye flour. The government has given them great encouragement and assistance, in spite of their religious basis. An excellent government stallion is stationed at the commune stables for the service of the surrounding villages. A young member of the group was sent to the government school for tractorists when the commune bought its tractor. A Communist agricultural group of the same county was refused admission to the same school for one of its members for lack of space, and protested that the government had favored a religious organization. But they were told that the government was not concerned with the religious beliefs of farmers but with their agricultural activities, and that they considered this commune a highly successful enterprise which should be helped.

The organization is operated in its general work by a council composed of the heads of the various departments of activity. A committee of five acts as the executive group. All matters of primary importance are decided by the group as a whole. A common treasury, common warehouses, and common table, are maintained. Clothing is provided as needed, and is largely made by the group's sewing department. The children are kept in the rooms of the parents until the age of fifteen, when they are transferred to the young people's quarters. When I asked what means they had of disposing of possibly lazy and dishonest members, the head of the executive committee replied:



"We do not need to throw them out. Such persons find it uncomfortable here and leave of their own accord."

#### ARTELS

Parallel with the communal movement, a much simpler cooperative scheme grew up, under the general designation of *artel*, an old term used to designate groups of workmen who banded together for a season's work. Artels of one sort or another have increased with phenomenal rapidity. Statistics for thirty seven gubernias of European Russia, gathered by the League for Agrarian Reform, show that there were 442 registered artels in March, 1918, and that this number had increased more than ten times, to the astounding figure of 4,780, by September, 1920.

In its simplest form, the artel is an association of a group of peasants who have pooled their work, animals, and machinery for the cultivation of a common plot of land. This may have been granted them from a part of an old estate, or each member may have brought his share of the village holding to the enterprise and by arrangement with the village land committee have had all the shares granted together in one large plot. The group often buys seed, machinery, or other farm equipment together. Usually the members retain their homes in the village, though they may, as I have seen them in Samara Gubernia, go out a few miles from the village and build new houses, or transfer their old ones bodily to the new location in order to be near their land. No communal social life is involved in this plan, and the profits of the enterprise are divided on a general basis proportionate to the labor and capital brought to it.

The pure communal movement soon began to lose

ground. Many of the groups which were organized on this basis gradually changed to a simpler form of cooperation or disbanded. The same statistical source quoted above shows that there was an actual loss of about three hundred and fifty communes from 1919 to 1920. I have talked to a number of members of organizations which were formerly pure communes and have discovered that in a great majority of cases the trouble started in the kitchen. Simple questions of the rotation of kitchen service, or the effort to please all sorts and conditions of palates at a common table were enough to wreck the peace of the group. As one leader of a group which had passed, by gradual degrees, from a pure commune to a simple arrangement of cooperation put it, "the women got sick and tired of the plan." Another group now successfully operating as an *artel*, told us how the cows were not well milked when they were communally owned, but when they reverted to private ownership each woman took good care of her own cow. Shirking and laziness were also generally prevalent among the men. My own observation is that wherever a commune has worked successfully, there is usually found one strong leader who acts as patriarch of the group, and more or less openly guides its destinies.

#### THE COLLECTIVE UNDER THE N. E. P.

With the coming of the New Economic Policy, it was expected by many observers that the whole cooperative system of the use of land would collapse. But as a matter of fact, while the communal movement has made comparatively little gain, the more simple forms of collective use of the land have gone steadily forward. An article in *Economy Life* by Sadirin, April 10, 1926, comments that:

"Twenty two thousand collectives with one million people, operating on three million dessiatines of land, with seven hundred thirty nine subsidiary enterprises, give witness to the vitality of this movement. Add to this the fact that the growth of the collective movement for the last year has been for the most part on the peasant's own land allotments, and that in general the agricultural technique of the collective is higher than that of the individual neighboring plots and is more and more winning the confidence of the peasantry."

It will be noted that the term now applied to the general movement for cooperative production on the land is "Collective." The newer form of organization which grew up after the NEP (New Economic Policy) is that of a simple stock company. The land is secured in one large plot. Work animals and machinery are owned by the company. The business is carried on by a group corresponding to a board of directors. Wages are paid, the obligations of the company are met, sums are provided for a sinking fund, new machinery, and so on, and dividends are declared, if there remains a balance, on the basis of investment. The details of organization vary, but the agreements in every case must be registered with the county authorities. Provisions for the general rights and obligations of such enterprises are made in the Land Codex. (Articles 103-111). Members may withdraw from these organizations at will and demand their share of the investment, and counter claims for damages may be lodged by the remaining members.

The survey made by the Russian Reconstruction Farms, previously referred to, found in one county of the south, in 1925, twenty-two collective organizations, all artels or cooperatives. Four originally had been organized as communes, but had, without exception,

adopted the newer plans. Sixteen of them had been organized since 1923, indicating the continued growth of the movement. The groups vary in size from six to thirty-five families, and their plots of land vary from 162 to 1,400 acres.

A few examples of this group (quoted from material of the Russian Construction Farms survey) will serve to illustrate the tendency of the movement.

"The Dawn of Communism" was organized in 1920 as a commune. It was reorganized two years later as a collective. The group was made up of ten families totaling fifty-one persons. They received 1,176 acres of arable land as their share from the village and rented an additional hundred and fifty acres from the government. These people are settled on their land, each family with its individual house and private small stock, their chickens, pigs, and cow. The farm machinery is owned by the company. They have two tractors, a threshing machine, a binder, and various light implements. Common obligations, for taxes, machinery loans, and so on, are met out of profits. A certain percentage is set aside for the purchase of new machinery or other improvements, another part for working capital, and the balance is then divided among the workers on the basis of capital invested and labor performed. A still further dividend is also made in the form of an equal bonus to each family. This group received substantial credit from the government both for the purchase of their tractors and for the digging of an artesian well. It can be counted a highly successful agricultural and social enterprise.

"The Light of Truth" has fifteen families, seventy-five persons, 648 acres of land. It was organized in 1922. The members of the group live in the village six

miles from their land, but are planning to move out to their holdings. They own six horses, fifteen cows, a tractor of the heavier type, and other machinery. The initial payment on the tractor was borrowed from the Agricultural Bank, and the balance was paid in two installments after the harvest, with allowance for extension in case of crop failure. At the end of the harvest season one quarter of the profit is distributed as dividends in accordance with the amount of labor and original investment. The remaining seventy-five percent is used for the retirement of debts, the purchase of new machinery, and, as in the case of "The Dawn of Communism," a certain percentage, varying with the earnings of the organization, is distributed on a straight pro rata basis.

"The New Way (or Journey)" was organized by nine very poor families in 1925. They surrendered their holdings in the village shares and were given 108 acres about two miles from the village, with the promise of the full eight acres per "eater" due them, at the next season. They had no horses. With no security save their collective note, they were given a loan by the bank at the regular rate of fourteen percent interest with which to buy six horses and the necessary machinery for beginning. A little later, when they had demonstrated their solidarity, they were given another loan for general land improvement at one percent for five years. The first year's harvest, which was a good one, had been used, according to the statement of the president of the group, first, to provide the actual needs of each family. The balance had then been applied to the liquidation of loans and the purchase of additional machinery. They had applied for a tractor, and were enthusiastically planning for enlargement.

Smirnov, Commissar of Agriculture, in an article in *Economic Life* November 7, 1925, estimated that the present proportion of the various types of cooperative agriculture was about as follows: Communes, 12 percent, artels, 58 percent, collectives, 30 percent. The balance has since then been constantly swinging still further in the direction of the collective. He also estimates in the same article that more than 50 percent of the members of the agricultural collectives, using this term in the wider sense, are from the poor peasants—that is, those having neither horse nor cow.

The showing already made in the direction of this form of social production is significant, but it waits for a more complete demonstration of its decided economic value before it captures the mass of twenty million peasant homes, which in the meantime move on in the paths of their fathers. The whole tendency of removal from the village to the land either in groups or for the formation of individual farms is retarded by the lack of water in the sections where the land is most plentiful, for it requires a considerable outlay of capital to sink satisfactory artesian wells.

It can be safely said, on the whole, that pure economic interest is the prime motive in the growth of the collective movement, and, in good Socialist terminology, generally only those unite in these organizations who have nothing to lose but their chains. On the positive side, the movement is given precedence in loans, in the distribution of land, and in the assignment of tractors on liberal loan terms. Indeed conditions are made so favorable that bitter complaint is entered that spurious collectives are frequently organized by the richer peasants for the purpose of getting a tractor or some other sort of loan.

Every effort is made to make the movement part of the whole scheme of agricultural cooperation. The All-Union Council of Collectives, working under the Union of Agricultural Cooperatives, unites with the Cooperatives in the publication of a bi-monthly journal of thirty-two pages, called *The Collectivist*, first issued in January, 1926. Furthermore, the collective often plays an important part in the management of the local agricultural cooperative. The movement is coming to receive more and more attention in all newspapers and journals, and is regarded by Communist party leaders as one of the most hopeful means of establishing socialism in the village. The Fifteenth Party Conference definitely recommended, in its summary resolution, the giving of particular attention to all forms of collective agriculture and to the Soviet Farms.

#### ENTER THE TRACTOR

The place of the tractor in the scheme of Russian agriculture, particularly as it functions in the promoting of the collective movement, is so significant that it must receive special attention at this point.

When Arthur Ransom visited Russia during the terrible winter of 1919, he asked the Commissar of Agriculture what he regarded as the greatest need of agricultural Russia, and was given the reply in one word, "Tractors." I remember a conversation with the president of a commune in Samara Gubernia in 1922, just on the heels of the famine. We were discussing religion, in response to his enquiries about the faith of the Quakers who were engaged in famine relief in the district.

"We don't believe in God any longer," he said. "The tractor is our god."

The statement of this communar is not to be taken quite baldly, but certainly the tractor is more than a mere means of mechanical power to the Russian mind of today. Pictures of tractors are emblazoned on posters, engraved on paper money, broadcast over the country on the faces of calendars. It is hard to find a journal in any way interested in agriculture which does not devote a great deal of space to the subject.

The attitude of the authorities toward the use of the tractor is well summarized in the closing paragraph of the article of Smirnoff, quoted above, from *Economic Life*.

"The tractor is of extreme importance for collectivization. Eighty percent of the whole number of tractors have led to the formation of various types of cooperatives and collectives for their use. The tractor, without doubt, is one of the greatest factors in eliminating the lines of individual peasant production. If a tractor is linked with the cooperative and is used correctly, we have in it not only an agricultural machine but a new factor in the growth of the socialist element in the village. The tractor unites the poor peasants particularly, raising their production, and in a real way preventing the kulak from exploiting them. It allows them to put up a real fight with the capitalistic element in the village."

In 1925, ten thousand Fordsons were imported. It is generally estimated that about seventy-nine percent of these went into the hands of the peasants. The rest were assigned to state farms and other government and social institutions. About five percent were sold to private individuals, who often got them through the organization of fictitious collectives made up of two or three families. More than half, naturally, went to the



great grain sections of the North Caucasus and the Volga. Great demands for them were made also from Siberia and the Urals.

Taking the county of Archangelskoe again for an example, the first tractor came in 1924. I found in 1926 a total of thirty-eight in the hands of the peasants, nine of which were privately owned. The rest belonged to the collectives. Thirty of the thirty-eight were bought during 1925-1926. In general the prices asked were from two to three times the retail price in America for the same tractor. Collectives paid a small first installment and were given from two to three years to pay the balance. Private buyers paid cash.

The research workers of the Russian Reconstruction Farms, after a close investigation of the general tractor situation of the county, concluded that its chief trouble lay in a lack of adequate service with mechanics and spare parts. Many tractors were found standing idle in the fields after less than a year of use, with the nearest machine shops and mechanics that could give the needed service a hundred miles away. Considering the ordinary speed with which such matters move in Russia, it was often weeks, probably in the middle of harvest time, before a mechanic could be secured, the part brought, and the machine put in working order. The first tractor in the county was found standing in the field where it had been stranded for lack of simple repairs two years before.

Naturally this condition of affairs had its effect on the attitude of the peasants toward the new machine of which they had been led to expect so much. While an American mechanic was examining a tractor of one of the neighboring collectives which had been standing idle for several weeks for lack of repairs, a prosperous

peasant in the group of curious watchers who always gather around on such occasions, remarked,

"If my oxen lie down and won't work, I can take a stick and beat them and make them go. But you can't do that to this thing."

The authorities finally sensed this danger, and hastened to organize a service station with an itinerating shop and regional spare part stations. The Ter district organized a group of nine machinery inspectors whose business it is to cover their territories at regular intervals for the general inspection of machinery, giving mechanical advice and practical aid where possible. But spare parts are inadequate and the whole service is still far from perfect. Critics are perfectly correct in their contention that this phase of the agricultural program should have accompanied the introduction of the tractor instead of lagging after it.

As an actual matter of numbers the role of the tractor in Russian agriculture is still insignificant. For, although according to the estimate of the Assistant Director of Agriculture, there were twenty-two thousand working in the whole Union of Soviet Republics in the spring season of 1926, an astounding increase over the practical zero following the war, this is still a drop in the bucket of the twenty million or more peasant households. Rykov, in his speech before the Fifteenth Party Conference in November, 1926, in dealing with the question of agriculture and industrialization, pointed out, "Only one factory, Putilovski, is adapted to the production of tractors, and it produces them five or six times more expensively than they can be produced abroad."

According to the article of *Izvestia*, June 12, 1926, already quoted in part, the home production to that

date had been 577 tractors. A new factory is being constructed in Stalingrad but there is little likelihood that the domestic supply of tractors will in any appreciable measure meet the demands for a number of years to come, and the greater number of them will continue to come from America.

The millions of acres of rich level lands of Russia, without fences or natural barriers, cry out for the tractor and for the most modern forms of large scale production on a scope that can be undertaken only by government institutions, or by such groups of united farmers as we have described. But the tractor, as well as the collective, is still in the trial stage, so far as its wide spread adoption is concerned. The tractor will not displace the ox and horse because of posters or any other propaganda, but only if these few thousand scattered through the country prove beyond a doubt to the hard-headed peasant that they are economically better.

#### THE SOVHOZ

Under the new types of land usage, the *Sovhoz*, or Soviet Farm, should be considered.

In 1921, according to the All-Russian Year Book, more than four thousand of these farms were operating the estates of former landlords, totaling more than two million dessiatines of land. The first measures of control after the Revolution had been taken by the government in order to prevent the valuable properties of these estates from being dissipated among the peasants by indiscriminate seizure. But the move was not quick enough to save quantities of stock and machinery, furniture, and other articles of value from being lost before any kind of organized administration could be installed.

And this primary loss was, in turn, followed by a period when the managers of the newly organized Government Farms themselves exploited the property for all it was worth to increase production during the crisis of hunger through which the country passed. As a consequence, when the estates were finally organized into regional groups under the control of sectional land trusts and were expected to become profitable government business enterprises under the New Economic Policy, they were already heavily handicapped by an inheritance of buildings and equipment in poor repair, a much decimated supply of livestock, and no capital. A review of the condition of the sovhozes at the end of the ninth year of the Revolution, in *Agricultural Life* for November 4, 1926, shows that as late as 1924 less than half the land which was in use on these farms had been ploughed by the organizations themselves. More than twenty percent was rented or let to peasants in various ways. The balance was left in pasture or used for hay.

I worked for more than a year with the Russian Reconstruction Farms, a corporation which began operating a sovhoz in partnership with the North Caucasian Agricultural Trust in 1925. The fifteen thousand acres of land, with subsidiary mills and other enterprises which were included under a single administration by this contract, were formerly parts of three estates. Under the Russian administration which preceded, this vast undertaking had been combined with two other large estates to form a single unit. Although this group, because of the profitable business of the mills and vineyards, had been one of the few units of the trust which up to that time had been self-supporting, the American organization found the buildings and equip-

ment badly in need of repairs. Evidently only the absolutely necessary remounting to prevent decay had been done since the revolution. Buildings were unpainted, roofs leaking, mud-brick structures falling into decay, fences broken. The courtyard was full of damaged and discarded machinery. There was absolutely no working capital.

During the first years of the NEP, managers of the Sovhozes, driven by pressure to make ends meet, resorted to driving hard bargains with workmen and renters, much in the fashion of the old landlords. This added to the dislike on the part of the peasants, who already resented this use of the land and felt that these estates should have been divided among the villagers. Land suits ensued. The American organization referred to, for example, inherited a bitter dispute with the village, which was carried finally to the highest authorities. This situation, added to the critical economic struggle, forced the abandonment of hundreds of sovhozes, and the adoption of a much more clearly defined program and aims for the remaining thirteen hundred groups.

A glance at the present ideal role of the sovhoz, is given by a writer in *Agricultural Life* (November 18, 1926). Commenting on a report of the Government Planning Bureau, he says that the function of the sovhoz lies in performing three important tasks: "First, creating higher standards for agricultural products, to be used not only by the sovhoz, but by the surrounding peasants; second, introducing better methods for working the land and caring for stock, on this basis encouraging the mechanization of these processes; third, the industrialization of the sovhoz, by introducing on it industrial enterprises for working up the raw materials produced by the surrounding peasants."

The possibility of these great farms functioning in this fashion is very well demonstrated in the experience of the American operated estates of which we have spoken. This organization is now one of the most highly mechanized agricultural enterprises in the Soviet Union. It uses nineteen tractors for all the power in the farm operations except the lightest transport, and all the machinery for the complete process of cultivation and harvest is also of the latest American types. During the first season, under the most adverse conditions of drouth and locusts, the average production of wheat was fourteen bushels per acre, as compared with the village average of nine bushels. The machine shop, which was organized primarily for the service of the machinery of the organization, was also able to do a limited amount of repair work for the neighboring collectives and for a few individual farmers of the village. Certain social work done with the tractors and other machinery, such as threshing for poor families, also contributed to the gradual allaying of most of the local dislike and distrust of the Sovhoz. Furthermore, the whole enterprise became a demonstration project in the very process of carrying on its ordinary work. Peasants from far and near, singly and in groups, came to see the whole plant, from the automatic electric water system in the basement to the wonderful combined harvester-thresher in the field. Official delegations came from schools, and agricultural authorities, from the Commissar of the Union department down, came to ascertain the results of the various experiments.

In addition to this informal and unofficial educational work, ten students came from the greatest agricultural college of Russia, the Timerazov Academy at Moscow, and along with ten other peasant boys from various

parts of the country spent nearly three months of practical work in learning at first hand the processes of large scale mechanized farming. These boys were treated as a special group and efforts were made to see that they should have as much experience as possible in the actual use of machinery in the fields. Besides this, a small group of orphans sent by the district authorities were given a home and placed in apprenticeship in the varied activities of the farms. To this should be added, as an educational by-product of no small significance, the training of some seventy local peasant boys as tractor drivers, under the direction of experienced supervisors.

The district agricultural department made the sovhoz a base for a study of a half dozen good stallions, and for the breeding of better hogs for the benefit of the local farmers. Various experimental crops were also planted under the direction of the trusts interested in their growth, as well as the experimental crops of the sovhoz itself.

The chief industrial projects of the organization are flour milling and wine making, with a small excursion into wagon building. Not only is all the grain of the farms milled, but hundreds of thousands of bushels are bought in the neighborhood and milled. The winery uses not only the grapes of the large vineyard of the farms, but buys grape juice from the nearby peasants as well.

With the introduction of a completely mechanized system, the farming acreage was increased two hundred and fifty percent the first year, and the whole enterprise, by a careful management of the mills, was able to complete the year, even in a bad farming season, without a deficit. A great deal of necessary repairing and remodeling was also done. The government is planning

to make still greater use of the place as a center for tractor aid to the surrounding district, and the Agricultural Academy will greatly increase its quota of students for the next season of practical work.

This case is cited, not as an example of the average Soviet Farm, but as an illustration of the sort of thing the government is undertaking to do with all of them. The statistics for the years 1923-6 show substantial gains in acreage cultivated, a generally better yield than that of the surrounding peasantry, increases in the value of stock and equipment, a doubling of the numbers of workers employed, and an increase of the average wage paid of from ten to twenty roubles per month. On the other hand, while eight of the regional trusts showed a profit of two and a half million roubles for 1925, the remaining groups brought the total to a net loss by a deficit of three millions.\*

These three projects—the collective, tractorization, and the Sovhoz—are part of the same idea, the socialization and general improvement of land uses. None of them may be said to be past the experimental stage. All three of them are intensely interesting, and like many another of the experiments of Russia have wide significance for world agriculture, and for America in particular. They have cost a great deal of money, and perhaps a great deal more will be spent in the process of discovering by the trial and error method the practical path somewhere between the ideal and the possible.

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\* *Agricultural Life*, No. 44—"The Sovhozes and the Ninth Year of the October Revolution."



## CHAPTER V

### GOVERNMENT EDUCATION AND AID IN AGRICULTURE

WE have seen that the Revolution inherited a rural life literally centuries behind in its agricultural methods, to be further crippled by seven devastating years of a world conflict, civil war and famine. All statistics of progress begin with 1922-23, and take as their norm pre-war figures, which in most cases have not even yet been completely equalled. Cast against this background and handicapped by the poverty of the country, the accomplishments and programs of village improvement directed by the authorities are magnificent.

#### AGRICULTURAL SCHOOLS

First let us look at formal education in agriculture, if any education in Russia can be called formal. All education of the country is based on the project idea and begins by relating the child to his environment. Thus the smallest child of the village is taught to understand what is going on about him with the changing seasons, to know the reasons for what is being done, and as he grows older to look for better ways of doing the work of the fields and garden. In 1925 a special type of school was developed throughout the country, known as the School for Peasant Youth. It is the plan that there shall be at least one such school in each county or

township. Boys and girls who have finished the four years of the village school, normally at the age of twelve, are admitted to this school. The course is of three years duration, with special emphasis on the agricultural and home economics phases of instruction. Children coming from the village are either boarded with friends, or, as I found in one township of the Leningrad Gubernia, the school authorities provide lodging at cost, in this case about five dollars a month.

In Archangelskoe county, we found about forty pupils in attendance during the first year of the school's history. The next season the number was increased. The entire staff of the county agricultural adviser, or *agronom*, is used as instructors for the course, in addition to the regular teachers. The chief agriculturist himself gives two hours a day, and the surveyor and veterinarian an hour each, as a part of their regular duties. The school is allotted a plot of thirty-five acres which is used as an experimental farm, and at the same time contributes considerably to the school budget, which is always inadequate for its ambitions. The child who completes this school may pass without examination to the higher technical agricultural schools of the state or district.

In addition to these county schools, as yet in the period of formation and often poorly equipped, more specialized and technical schools for boys and girls of fifteen to eighteen are found in a reorganized continuance of old schools of a similar nature for the training of local agronomists and various types of specialists. These schools usually specialize in the characteristic crops of the district in which they are located. For instance, I visited one such school in the North Caucasus grape section, which, while it had a general farm and engaged

in numerous farm experiments and practical work, specialized in its vineyard and the making of wine.

Educational financing in general is a local matter, so that wide variations in equipment, buildings, and general working budget, will be found. But on the whole, the gravest problem is the securing of an adequate number of properly trained teachers. The central schools of the gubernia or district and such great institutions as the Timerazov Academy near Moscow, of course, fare better, and will compare favorably with agricultural institutions anywhere. All of them evince the tendency to specialize early in the course, and all of them link practical work intimately with the classroom. Young men and young women are sent out by the hundreds each summer for practical work with a definite program on Sovhozes and in factories, and they are required to make detailed reports of their activities as a part of the academic schedule. No title or certificate is finally given by the school until after the student has demonstrated his practical ability by the completion of a project in actual work after he has finished the academic requirements.

#### AGRANOMS

One of the chief functions of these higher schools is the production of the agranoms referred to above. The work of the agranom is the most widespread effort of the government to raise the general level of agricultural production. A resume in *Agricultural Life* for November 4, 1926, gives some significant statistics concerning the various aspects of the work of this important department:

Before the Revolution there were 1,075 agranoms in

Russia proper. On the first of October, 1926 there were 2,700 in the same territory, a gain of more than one hundred percent. It is the definite plan to have an agronom with a well equipped station in every county of the country by 1928. Thirty-two percent of these men have had higher education, fifty-one percent middle education. Their wages averaged sixty-eight roubles for 1925-26, double that of the period of 1923-24. The local budgets were increased in general more than twenty-five percent during the same period. These stations have organized more than 87,000 peasants into closely cooperating committees and experimental groups.

This article lists as the most important phases of the work of this department: widening the culture of technical crops, increasing the use of proper crop rotation, improving the breed of livestock, propaganda for better methods of cultivation, increasing the industrialization and mechanization of agriculture, and promoting cooperation in the poor and middle groups of farmers. In all these objects great progress has been made. Selected seed grain distributed among the peasants has increased from 250,000 poods (a pood is 36 pounds) in 1924 to 3,000,000 poods in 1926. The percentage of land under cultivation in a many-field system as opposed to the old three-field plan increased from 3.2 percent in 1923 to 20 percent in 1926. The seeded areas of technical crops have approximated that of pre-war times in most cases, and in hemp, sunflowers, and potatoes have increased several times.

Also noted, however, are the still inadequate budgets, the low salaries of the agronomists, the lack of the proper transport facilities, which greatly hampers the effectiveness of the stations, and the fact that the agronomists are often required to do a great deal of clerical and other

work not officially connected with their departments, which interferes with the greater extension of their real functions. All these items vary greatly, again because of the fact that the offices of the agronom are maintained on local budgets.

I know the work of the county agronom of Archangelskoe county in the North Caucasus with fair intimacy. Let us look at his program. The station occupies a former residence of a well-to-do villager with a large courtyard. The walls of the three rooms of the house are covered with posters and agricultural exhibits, photographs of prize cattle and horses and fairs. And, of course, a portrait of Lenin. This comparatively rich county boasts a chief agriculturist, an assistant, a part time veterinarian, and a surveyor. It has been noted that three of these men devote part of their time every day to work in the School for Peasant Youth. The station maintains no experimental fields of its own, but engages the assistance of interested peasants in the trial of new crops and methods on their own fields. During the breeding season, cattle and horses are stationed in the courtyard by the District for the use of the peasants at a nominal rate based on the social status of the user.

Another activity of the agronom is the organization and promotion of the county fair, which was introduced into Archangelskoe county for the first time in 1925. This first fair, while not so extensive, compared very favorably in the interest of its exhibits and their variety with those in America. It was well attended, and the intelligent questions that were asked at exhibits and lectures indicated that more than idle curiosity swelled the crowds. The second fair, a year later, was larger and in every way more successful than the first. This move-

ment is growing throughout Russia, beginning with the counties and expanding through the larger enterprises of Gubernia and Krai to such magnificent exhibitions as the great fair at Moscow in 1923, which came on the very heels of the famine. Special provisions are made for the attendance of vast numbers of representatives directly from the village to take part in even these larger fairs.

Smaller exhibits and plentiful graphic posters are used everywhere that peasants are likely to congregate. You find them in railway stations, reading rooms, the village soviet building, the farmers houses of the city. I visited the session of the state soviet of the Ter district and found there an extensive and well-arranged exhibit of agricultural products, models of mechanical devices for the farm, club house models for the village, and so on.

#### AGRICULTURAL LITERATURE

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the whole campaign for agricultural propaganda is seen in the enormous output of books, pamphlets, and journals. The Department of Agriculture at Moscow, to mention only one publisher, lists in the catalogue of its press issued in June, 1926 more than seven hundred and fifty books and pamphlets, covering every possible technical interest of the farmer, besides tales, songs, children's stories, and so on. The publications are bound in attractive paper covers, often gaily decorated, and are sold for a few copeks to a rouble or more, depending on the size. Such books are advertised in the farm papers, distributed through the village reading rooms, and sold in the numerous bookshops of the larger towns and the cooperatives of the village. I found the book

department of the northwest section of the Union of Cooperatives tucked away up the back stairs of the handsome offices of the Union, but doing a huge business. A year ago they began on a plan of advancing fifty roubles worth of books to village cooperatives on eighteen months' credit. Four hundred such book stations had been organized within the year, and most of them sold their five hundred pamphlets within three or four months.

The most widely circulated farmer's newspaper is *The Peasant's Gazette*, from the press of the Central Committee of the All Union Communist Party. It is a small, four columned, eight page weekly paper, poorly printed but well illustrated, with an edition of more than eight hundred thousand. A campaign among the village boys of the army during the summer of 1926 added a hundred thousand subscribers. An advertisement in the issue for December of the same year offered the paper for one year, plus a monthly journal called *The Peasant's Information Book*, plus "two artistic many-colored pictures, 31 x 23 centimeters each," for one rouble eighty copeks.

An idea of the nature of the paper may be had from a glance at a copy picked up on the newstand of Lenin-grad. The first page is devoted to the Communist International, and particularly the attitude of this body toward the great Russian party conflict of 1926. Half the second page is given over to foreign news summaries under the head of "In the Lands of Capitalism"—"The League of Nations and its treatment of Germany," "Capitalists Unite Against Workers," "Revolutionary China Raises Her Voice," "Insurrection in Lithuania." On the second half of the same page is news of Russia under the heading "Throughout the Soviet Union."

Here we find: "All Union Census Begins," "Territory of White Russia Increased," "Sugar Will be Cheaper," "467,000 Roubles for Breeding Horses Imported to Russia," "How Go the Preparations for Election of Soviets," "Death of a Singer of Folk Songs," and so on. The entire third page is filled with preparations for the coming elections under the general heading "In the Instructions, Require an Accounting, and According to the Account Build the Instructions."

From this page on, the peculiar characteristic of the Russian newspaper of this type appears. Most of the material is supplied by village correspondents. There is criticism of local soviets, schools, cooperatives, and so on, favorable and unfavorable. All details are given with names and dates, and with the utmost frankness. Here are stories of how the elections were conducted last year in various villages. Turn the page and we find a half dozen letters under the heading "The Fight for Lower Prices," and two columns of correspondents' discussion of the question of the comparative values of different forms of agriculture. Pages five and six are devoted to agricultural experiments, again with the peasant correspondent himself having a good share of the page; and the article of the agronom. Scandal in a school with a dishonest principal, harvest of a Sovhoz twice as good as that of the surrounding farmers, how a pair of crooks in charge of a cooperative robbed a peasant of his money in a card game. Page seven, Military Corner, with an appeal to "remember the families of the Red Army," an article on the needs of a savings bank, and the one private advertisement of the paper, that of a musical instrument company of Moscow. Finally, on the last page is an advertisement of the various publications of the press of the *Farmer's Gazette*.



In addition to this paper, the principal sections of the country produce journals dealing with the peculiar problems of their districts and the retailing of local news. The northwest section, for instance, publishes *The Red Village*, an excellent farmer's weekly journal of twenty-four pages, richly illustrated with pictures and diagrams, and well balanced in news and agricultural information. Many of the larger districts of a gubernia, called the *ooyezd*, also publish newspapers.

*The Farmer's Calendar*, published by the press of the Department of Agriculture, is a real mine of knowledge, containing almost any bit of information the peasant may conceivably want to know, from what to name the baby to how to build a chicken house. For instance it has: a running comment on the chief historical events of the revolutionary movement, an outline of the organization of the Soviet state, a resume of the laws touching the farmer, a section on the cooperatives, an excellent section of agricultural instruction and practical aids, a department of general information, with articles on the railways, posts, weights and measures, and so on, and finally two pages of dictionary in the back to make clear any unusual words.

*Agricultural Life*, the official organ of the Department of Agriculture, is a more technical twenty-two page monthly magazine which is circulated among agronomists, local departments of agriculture, and the like. It has a circulation of about ten thousand. The leading article is from the pen of the Commissar of Agriculture, and the magazine is edited by the assistant of the Department. The paper, make-up, and printing are all that could be desired, and the articles cover a variety of related topics in a thoroughly satisfactory manner,

always simple enough to be understood even by the lay reader and scientific enough for the student.

The sixty-four page magazine, *The New Village*, also published by the press of the Department of Agriculture, is an excellent practical farmer's publication issued every two weeks with a circulation of twelve thousand. There are also special women's magazines for the village, magazines for the village reading room, for the theatre, and for the children and young people.

Thus the press is bombarding the village from every angle. The authorities are aware that the ultimate prosperity, and even the ultimate political health of the country, depends upon an enlightened farmer who is intelligently increasing the productivity of his soil and entering into the organized life of his community. This fusillade often rebounds from a wall of ignorance and indifference. But active groups of workers in the village read during the winter evenings to the peasants who are illiterate, and the village reading rooms are always prepared to answer their questions. Thus, little by little, the printed word is penetrating.

Here, too, a word must be said of the educational function of the army and universal military service. By a selective scheme based on the home obligations of the candidates, every male youth of Russia must spend from eight months to two years in the army sometime during a period of five years. The boast that no man leaves the Red Army illiterate is well known. But he learns more than simply to read and write. He is given a bit of history and geography. He is acquainted with the life of the city or town in which he may be stationed, and an effort is made to establish through him a bond between the city and the country. In addition

to all this, books on politics, books on agriculture, books of all kinds and shapes and subjects, are spread before him in the reading room of his barrack. As has already been noted, the army is used as a base for recruiting subscribers to the farmers' paper. This process carried out in an army nine-tenths peasant must, in some degree, bear fruit.

Thus we have, within the limits of insufficient capital, widespread and growingly effective measures to educate the peasant in better forms of land culture. But this is not enough. As a writer in *Agricultural Life* quotes Lenin, "It is impossible to eat the land, and without money, without capital sufficient for implements, live-stock, and seed, we are nowhere." In the sense in which the farmer himself, whether in Russia or America, asks the question, what is the government doing for the farmer? The whole list of undertakings is an imposing one. We can examine but a few of the more significant.

#### CREDIT

The aid which touches most intimately every phase of village progress, as well as that of industry, is credit. Whether this is seen in the form of deferred payments on machinery, the loan of seed, or direct loans of money for capital, in the final analysis the government is lending aid in Russia. Here again we must remember that the Soviet currency was not stabilized until 1923, and that since that time the *chervonetz*, which is the monetary basis of this new system, has weathered several severe crises only by the strictest economy. It must also be remembered that Russia has received no great international loans, and scant credit abroad for the importation of machinery, implements, or other necessities

of the farmer. She has had to pay gold on short-term notes.

In the face of this situation, the achievements of the agricultural credit system are truly remarkable. The unified plan which was instituted in 1924 includes all organizations from the Central Agricultural Bank to the local credit societies. In this two and a half year period to the middle of 1926\*, the number of local credit organs in the Union of Soviet Republics increased from 5,353 to 9,200; the membership from a million one hundred thousand to over four million two hundred thousand. The total balance of the entire system increased, in the same period, from two hundred and twenty-nine million roubles to a billion two hundred and twenty million, or a gain of more than five times the original balance in less than three years. In 1925-26, 117,500,000 roubles were advanced in loans to individual peasants, mostly the poor class, in sums up to three hundred roubles.

In the realm of credit for machinery, the scale announced by the Commissariat of Trade for the Soviet Union in the summer of 1926 provides for cash payments for all domestic machinery and implements up to forty-five roubles; for that equipment costing from forty-five to one hundred roubles, half must be paid at the time of purchase and the balance after the first harvest; payments for machinery costing more than a hundred roubles are divided into three parts, a first cash payment and the balance over two harvests. The same general plan applies to imported machinery, except that cash is demanded up to purchases of sixty roubles. Over fourteen million roubles were expended in seed

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\* *Agricultural Life* No. 45, November 11, 1926.

loans in 1925-26. Eleven million bushels of various seed grains were thus distributed, repayable at six per cent after the harvest.

#### HOMESTEADING

One of the most interesting projects of the government, which, like all the rest, waits upon increased capital for its fullest exploitation, is that of transplanting families from the over-populated areas to the undeveloped sections of the east and south. The high density of population in certain districts has been touched in a previous chapter. One writer estimates that there are not less than six million useless workers in the villages due to over-population. At the same time there were over a million unemployed in the cities. Bolshakov, in a summary of the work of transplantation in *Agricultural Life*, November 4, 1926, points out that for the ten years before the Revolution an average of three hundred thousand persons per year were drawn to the cities. Even the largest expansion of industry cannot hope to absorb this enormous over-population within any reasonable time. At present, unemployment continues in the cities. Therefore the government is turning its attention with great seriousness to the plan of transplantation. Prior to 1924 the movement had proceeded under the Soviet regime without centralized direction. At the end of 1926 there were almost a half million settlers in various sections of the country who had migrated independently of the government plan, and who were seeking land in the new areas to which they had moved. The plan as a whole proposes to transplant five million persons from Russia proper, the Ukraine, and White Russia, where the overcrowding is greatest.

An announcement in *The New Village* for August 15, 1926, describes the general conditions offered under the project. Land is announced as immediately available in the Lower Volga, Siberia, and the Far East for 160,000 emigrants. Permission must be sought for transmigration from the local land department in the definite Gubernias designated. The family must have not less than two and a half working members and from six to nine hundred roubles worth of property. Railway fare is free for children under ten and one quarter fare for adults. An especially low tariff is charged on freight for livestock and luggage. In addition, a loan of from one hundred and fifty to three hundred roubles is made to the family in goods or cash at the place of settlement, three to five years exemption from taxes is granted, and free timber for buildings is supplied where it is available. Only those migrating under the terms of the regular plan are eligible to any of these benefits. For the needs of this department thirty-two million roubles were included in the budget of 1925-26. The writers in the agricultural journals, however, still bewail the lack of funds, particularly for the capitalization of the poorer families who wish to migrate.

A phase of the same program is the plan for reclaiming tracts of unuseful land in the crowded sections, particularly by drainage. This is especially popular in the northwest where great quantities of land are rendered useless by swamps. In the smaller projects, local societies are formed which provide a small part of the necessary capital and such of the labor as is possible. The government supplies the balance of the capital and the technical aid, and always releases such redeemed land from taxes for a considerable period.

Some of the other significant direct aids to the farmer can only be mentioned. In twenty governments of the Russian union in 1926, for example, 1,390 well-bred stallions were made available to some fifty thousand peasants. Likewise pure-bred sheep, cattle, and hogs are imported each year to raise the lamentably low standards of domestic livestock. The Commissar of Agriculture estimates that in 1926 more than five million roubles worth of timber was given free to poor peasants and to farmers' societies of one sort or another. *The Farmer's Calendar* prints the picture of a former palace of the Czar in the Crimea which is now a sanitarium for peasants, with a capacity of one thousand per year. Small numbers of peasants are also given rests and cures in the Caucasus sanitariums. These are but a few of the literally hundreds of ways in which the government directly aids the peasant.

The noticeable fact which emerges from an examination of all statistics dealing with peasant economy since 1923 is the invariable increase in every activity undertaken, often advancing with geometrical progression from year to year. It must be admitted that all life had reached an almost zero ebb, and that a rapid recovery might be expected. But even in the light of this condition, the progress since the period of stabilization has been none the less remarkable.

It is true that with the use of unseasoned personnel and untried plans, none of which have a precedent anywhere, much precious capital has been wasted. A perfect mania for charts and surveys and reports has arisen to consume tons of paper and barrels of ink, to say nothing of the time spent in producing this material. Much of the material will probably be out of date before there is the slightest opportunity for putting it

into effect. Millions have been lost in unwise loans. The actual projects undertaken have not, themselves, always been sound. All of this, however, must be counted as tuition to that most expensive tutor under which Russia is learning—experience. At the same time, her journals and newspapers are filled with the frankest criticisms of mistakes and the hardest facing of facts, a practice which in the end should be able to overcome these defects.



## CHAPTER VI

### VILLAGE TRADE

UP to this point we have been chiefly concerned with agricultural production, the tenure of land, improved methods of culture and raising the standard of livestock. The disposal of these products and the supply of the village needs for manufactured articles involves one of the most interesting of the Soviet policies, the control of trade. Here, too, we find city and county drawn in the ancient battle array, and the pricking points of Trotsky's famous "scissors" widening the distance between the cost of manufactured articles and the sale price of agricultural products.

During the war-time Communism and before the stabilization of the currency, simple barter was resorted to, when, as the phrase goes, the city and town dwellers "ate their furniture and clothing." The farmer saw paper money increase to billions and change in value from day to day so that very shortly he would engage in no other trade than that in kind, a pood of bread for a coat, a measure of potatoes for a suit of clothes. I have known of even houses being sold for five or six bushels of wheat during the famine in Samara government. And as we shall see shortly, this mistrust of money has continued even to the present time to color the whole process of peasant trade.

#### THE MARKET PLACE

The ancient institution of the village market remains the most colorful and active form of trade for the peas-

antry. Every village of significance has its established market day, ordinarily on a Saturday or Sunday, though there seems to be a mutual agreement between neighboring villages to avoid conflicts. This arrangement is doubtless fostered by the petty merchants who travel from market to market to set up shop in booths for which they pay a license to the village. The roads leading to a good market are always alive with traffic during the night before market day. All manner of livestock, fruits, vegetables, home-made furniture, ox yokes, boots, and so on, to an infinite variety, have been gathered in the square by daylight. All kinds of traders are to be found, from the peasant woman squatting by her bottle of milk or pile of gay carrots, to the swarthy Armenian cloth merchant surrounded by the oriental splendors of fluttering cotton prints that decorate his booth. Among the crowds move scores of itinerant traders with all their wares worn on the sleeve, so to speak. A pair of boots, three or four petticoats, or a half dozen shirts may comprise the entire stock. The vender of heterogeneous junk, too, is always present with his pile of monstrous rusty locks, an unmated candlestick or so, hinges, door knobs, and a veritable Walt Whitman catalogue of other miscellany.

The chief charm of the market for trader and buyer alike is its bargaining. Here is one of those spots where Russia looks eastern. Woe unto the man who goes into the market and pays the first price that is asked him in the honeyed tones of the peasant. It may strike the foreigner as cheap enough and he will not stoop to question it. But such a practice will be heartily resented by your neighbors if you are going to stay in the community. It breaks the entire morale of the system. Let him who would buy eggs or pigs or calico in the market

square cultivate a surprised and pained tone at mention of the first price, gestures of eloquent disgust at the quality of the article considered, and a resolute swing on the heel at the proper moment.

The market, too, is more than a mere place for buying and selling. Like county court day in some places in America, or a perennial county fair, it is a social event. There are friends and relatives from neighboring villages. There may even be a merry-go-round. There is almost certain to be some innocent game of chance. At least there are people in plenteous numbers the thrill of pressing through crowds, the exchange of choice persiflage in which the Russian excels. All of which will doubtless keep the market alive as an institution long after its actual need has disappeared.

In the larger towns, some of the merchants of the market remain throughout the week to do business; and in the cities a large part of the household marketing for meat, dairy products, and green vegetables is done in the stalls of the public market. But the ordinary village market square is a deserted spot on the morning following the market. Only the skeleton booths remain, and the cooperative which is often located on the square does the routine bulk of the village business.

#### THE CONSUMERS' COOPERATIVE

It is, of course, impossible to examine at length the development of the cooperative movement in Russia within the limits of this study. But the role of this movement in the present system of trade in Russia is so significant that even a glance at its operation in one village is worth while.

Let us take the village of Maslov Kut as our case

study. In June, 1926, the consumers' cooperative had a membership representing 286 of the total of 750 households in the village. It had just suffered from mismanagement, to put it most kindly, and was saddled with a debt of three thousand roubles when a change was made and an energetic young man of long business experience took command. Within three months the membership was increased to 363, the entire debt had been paid and the confidence of the members renewed, while a business of ten thousand roubles a month was being carried on. There are three other stores in the village, two private and one run by the Agricultural Cooperative which is temporarily closed, also on account of mismanagement.

One of the private stores is located across the street from the consumers' cooperative and offers very lively competition, particularly in the sale of local products and articles which are purchased from private dealers in the cities. According to the astute young manager of the cooperative, the private dealer owes much of his success to a personal acquaintance with his constituency and an intimate knowledge of their needs and desires. On the other hand, most of the failures of the cooperatives are due to a dearth of honest and competent managers who have the interest of their work at heart. The president of the central union reported at the meeting of the All Union body of the organization in November, 1926, that, in 1924-25, thirty-one percent of all the cooperatives were affected to a greater or less degree by graft or mismanagement involving a loss of 5,300,000 roubles. This had been decreased so that it did not affect more than twenty-five percent of the cooperatives by the first half of 1926, but continues the gravest problem faced by the organization.

At the central office of the northwest section of the Union of Cooperatives, I interviewed the energetic young woman in charge of the recently organized department of education and propaganda of this district. This section, first of all, spreads the idea of cooperation, for while great strides have been made, not more than twenty-five percent of the population is yet represented in the movement. The ambition of the leaders is nothing less than the enrollment of every household in the country. By articles in the papers, corners in the village reading rooms, booklets, discussion groups, lectures and reports to village meetings of any sort, effort is made to stimulate interest in the formation and support of the local cooperative store. In addition, the educational department has undertaken the still more important task of training leaders and managers for the local organization and instructors for the districts. Short courses are held each year in the district centers for the better training of workers already engaged in the villages and for those in training. Other groups are organized for a few days' instruction to enable them to act as helpers and active workers in the local organization. The instructors are called into the city for thorough courses in all the plans and problems of the movement. Correspondence courses in the various aspects of the work are also offered for the benefit of those who for any reason cannot take advantage of the other forms of instruction. Further, special courses have been introduced into the public schools of the northwest district, and during the session of 1926 more than a thousand boys and girls were enrolled in classes which prepare them to take an active part in the movement.

The usual process in the formation of a new branch of the cooperative is very simple. Ordinarily a promoter

is sent into a village which has no cooperative store in order to stimulate a desire for one. Or a group in the village may, of their own accord, write to the district union requesting aid in the formation of a society. In any case, an instructor is sent out by the district headquarters to assist in the organization. One hundred members are required for a start. The membership fee is five roubles, of which fifty copeks must be paid at once. Twenty-five percent of the total membership dues goes to the cooperative union. The constitution is adopted, a control committee of from three to five men is elected for the management of the store, and a revision committee of three is chosen to keep a close watch over the business transactions of the organization and to audit its accounts regularly. The members elected to the active management of the society and its store receive a salary of thirty to seventy-five roubles a month, according to the strength of the society. Other workers are paid according to the local labor union rates. The revision committee is remunerated only for the actual work done. When the organization is formed the building for the store is selected, the cooperative union advances the stock on long term credits or provides the necessary capital, and business is begun. One price for all goods is made to all purchasers. Members are given a book in which their purchases are entered and dividends are declared on this basis at the annual meeting in accordance with the financial status of the society.

One other form of social retail distribution must be noted to complete the picture. This is the outright government store which is operated directly by a department of the government or one of the government trusts. For example, the Department of Agriculture

operates in every state capital and hundreds of the more important smaller economic centers, well-equipped hardware and implement stores, known as the *Gosselsklads*, an economical use of words meaning Government Agricultural Warehouses. These are distributing points for the heavier farm implements and machinery, lumber, iron, and so on, and they provide, as well, the best stocked supply of the ordinary hardware lines. The stores of this kind which I have seen in the North Caucasus district compare very favorably with such business enterprises in the larger agricultural towns of America and are doing a huge business. Many of the larger towns in the agricultural districts also have retail stores of such organizations as the Textile Syndicate.

#### THE AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVE

Let us now look at the business of exchange from the farmer's point of view, as it affects the disposal of his products, and then pass on to a consideration of the problems that ensue when the interests of farming and industry conflict. Approximately half the wealth of Russia is agricultural. By 1926 the total agricultural production has reached 88 percent of the pre-war norm. At the same time the industrial reconstruction had brought production to 95 percent of the pre-war standard. But Russia was never able to supply even her own need of manufactured articles. Her status in the world markets depends now, as never before, upon the products of her forests, mines, oil wells and agriculture.

In agriculture also we must note first of all the place of the cooperative idea. In this phase of the movement the lines of activity are less clearly drawn than in the

case of the consumers' society. Naturally, the productive activities of the organization will take their departure from the principal agricultural enterprises of the district in which the society is located. Thus, for example, there were reported in 1926 forty different kinds of societies, producing milk products, grain, potatoes, flax, and so on. The individual cooperative may engage also in a variety of outside activities. For instance, the Agricultural Cooperative of Maslov Kut, before it overreached itself, had a credit section, bought grain, ran a retail store for the sale, not only of agricultural implements, but also of general dry goods and hardware, owned a tractor with which it plowed for members, and operated a small grist mill.

On the first of January, 1927, it was estimated \* that about thirty thousand such organizations were active in the Soviet Union, with a constituency of nearly seven million peasant families. These are organized into large unions with thirteen principal centers. A million new members were added during the last year. Three new unions were added to include producers of eggs, tobacco and grain. The total turnover in trade was nearly a billion dollars. The cooperatives handled 90 per cent of all marketed milk products, 60 per cent of the tobacco, 30 per cent of the grain and 40 per cent of the re-handled potatoes. Some sixteen thousand different industrial enterprises are operated by these societies, principally for manufacturing projects related to agriculture, such as flour mills, cheese factories, potato-flour mills and the like.

The leaders complain of a lack of sufficient capital and a poorly regulated system of advancing credit to the

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\*Agricultural Cooperatives in U. S. S. R. Kaminski, *Moscow Pravda*, January 1, 1927.



societies by the credit organs. I am not in possession of statistics concerning mismanagement, but it is safe to say that the Agricultural Cooperative, as well as the Consumers', suffers from a sad lack of qualified managers and leaders. I have mentioned the fact that the local society at Maslov Kut was compelled to curtail its activities greatly and sell practically all of its stock, including its tractor, to avoid complete ruin. This was due to unwise expansion, and particularly to the extension of credit too indiscriminately and over too long periods. As we have noted in a previous connection, over four million or practically sixty percent of the members of the Agricultural Cooperatives are members of the credit sections. The following table quoted from *Agricultural Life* for September 23, 1926, showing the distribution of loans for the first year under the unified credit system is instructive (I quote only the principal items in percentage of the whole):

Farm machinery .. .. .	14.5%
Working capital .. .. .	14.2%
Intensive crops .. .. .	13.5%
Working animals .. .. .	11.0%
Seed .. .. .	7.0%
Hand-work projects .. .. .	5.2%

Before dismissing the part of organized cooperation in consumption and production in the village, a paragraph must be given to the organized phase of *Kustarni*, or home hand work. It is estimated \* that before the war not less than four million persons were engaged in some sort of home industry. While this is true of little more than half of this number at present, the

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\* *Farmer's Calendar*, 1927.

movement is on the increase and being encouraged in every way possible, principally by the removal of the taxes which were the chief cause of the diminishing of this form of production. A half million of these workers are organized into cooperative societies with a central marketing and financing organ. Kustarni retail shops can be found in the principal cities, and a considerable quantity of kustarni products are shipped abroad every year. The large significance of the movement, however, lies in its place in the local village economy. It not only provides work for great numbers of peasants in the winter but supplies a large share of the manufactured goods needed in the village. The great majority of such products as clothing, boots, tinware, woodenware, wagons, and so on are turned out by hand or with simple machinery in the village, a fact of really vast importance in a country which has passed through such an extended period of economic and industrial chaos.

#### THE GOVERNMENT—GRAIN BUYER

The government plays a direct part in the field of agricultural marketing, particularly in the important role of grain merchant.

It is only necessary to recall, in passing, the effect of the grain requisitions of the civil war period. The canny peasant figured that if he were to be deprived of all the grain he raised above his own needs, he would simply raise no more than he needed for his own family. Besides, the city offered little or nothing in exchange even if he should be left a few poods above the actual bread needs of his own house. The consequence was that the seeded area of the country shrank enormously,

dropping from eighty-eight million dessiatines in 1913 to sixty-one million in 1920. That same year, as all the world knows, one of the greatest famines of history broke over the war-ridden country. There are those who lay the famine to the grain requisitions. This policy, forced upon the Bolsheviki by life or death circumstances, certainly contributed to the situation by eliminating the customary surplus which every provident Russian peasant keeps in his bin against the recurring bad seasons. But I saw enough of the famine in the center of the worst-smitten section of the country to convince me, as it convinced all fair-minded investigators, that even with this surplus, the consecutive years of complete crop failure during this period would have brought famine in any case.

The NEP, which went into effect at the end of the famine period, inaugurated an era of reconstruction with emphasis on greater production all down the line, and by 1926 the pre-war seeded area had been all but equalled. Meantime, there developed the problem of getting this increasing part of the national wealth on the market, both at home and in Europe. Little by little a unified system has been built around the government grain trading organ, *Kleboproduct*. But here again inexperienced men have had to learn to conduct an enormous business by the bitter tutelage of experience. For example, I watched the interesting and critical grain campaign of 1925-26. The national budget was built and credits were advanced on the basis of a large grain crop which the government intended to throw on the European market. But the first difficulty was encountered in the incompetence of the purchasing system. Not only was grain bought by *Klebo-product*, but by the banks, the cooperatives, and several

other government organizations as well. The result was that in many cases these various agencies entered into bitter competition. Their machinery was cumbersome and slow in getting under way. Profiting by this state of affairs, private buyers swarmed over the country, offered slightly better prices, rushed the grain to the mills, and, in spite of weighted odds of high freight charges, lack of warehousing, and so on, reached the local market sooner and competed profitably with the government prices. This competition, however, affected the foreign market only incidentally, for the government controls this market absolutely. Eventually railway facilities were altogether refused to private buyers on the ground of preference to government agencies, so that they were effectually eliminated. But a still more serious impediment to the program was encountered. A part of the export program depended upon early delivery. But the peasant, remembering that grain prices had advanced in the spring of the year before, refused to sell at a price which would have made it possible for the government to compete with Canadian and American grain. Furthermore, there entered at this juncture the effect of the already painful dearth of manufactured goods.

A. Livoff quotes the figures that follow as indicative of the retail prices in January, 1926 (*Economic Life*, January 15, 1926):

	Pre-War	Jan., 1926
Cotton goods per arshin		
(about 1 yd.).....	19.7 copeks	57.4 copeks
Sugar per funt (about 1 lb.)	12.0 copeks	26.0 copeks
Kerosene per pood .....	2 roubles	1.97 roubles
Salt per pood.....	30 copeks	1.13 roubles

It was estimated about the same time that in the government of Saratov one rouble of the peasant would buy at the local store what was formerly only thirty-one copeks worth of goods. More than this, manufactured commodities badly needed by the farmer, such as cotton goods, were not to be had at any price, and there was practically nothing displayed which might lure the conservative peasant into parting with his grain. I have stood in line at the village cooperative during this period to buy a pair of rubbers only to be told that there might be some next week or the week after. Although the coming of a consignment of gaily colored cotton prints soon became news in the village, and the poor lean shelves were devastated of almost their last yard within a day, as a general tendency, the farmer kept his wheat in his bin. He had not forgotten the days when it was necessary to take to the store almost a bushel bag full of paper money to buy a pound of salt. The banks were offering eight percent on savings accounts, but he preferred a pood of grain in the bin to even a chervonetz in the bank. Besides, after the experiences of a few short years ago, it was not a bad sight to behold a brimming bin. There being nothing to buy, he locked the granary and waited. Meantime the national budget was shaking and the value of the chervonetz trembled on the edge of a chasm.

"A regime of economy" became the slogan in all departments of the government. As has been mentioned, the private dealers were driven from the market. The price of grain was actually lowered toward spring to prevent a repetition of the holding process the following year. Russian currency was saved by simply sitting tight. But problems underlying this episode were not eliminated. They rose like Banquo's ghost to harass

the Communist Party throughout the year and ended in the fierce factional struggle of the Fifteenth Conference in the fall of 1926. The general course of that conflict is well known to those who have followed Russian affairs with interest. The opposition, led by Trotsky, fearing the effect of the essentially petty capitalistic peasantry on the socializing program of the party, proposed a speeding up of the industrialization of the country by building factories at the expense of higher agricultural taxes, profits on imported manufactured articles to be sold to the village, and even an increase in the present high prices of home products. The majority, however, while fully sensing the need of industrialization, felt that it must not be done at the cost of increasing the present prices of manufactured goods, but, on the contrary, by increasing the output of the present factories and lowering the prices, continuing the regime of economy, and thus gradually industrializing the country. At the same time they proposed to further the actual socialization of the village through promoting and favoring every form of cooperative enterprise there.

The resolution finally adopted by this Congress, which acts as the guide for the closing year of the first decade of the Revolution, calls special attention to strengthening the cooperatives, particularly the agricultural cooperatives, the agricultural collective, and the sovhoz.

The grain campaign of 1926-27 was conducted with a better organized and more experienced apparatus. The agricultural cooperatives were given a notably larger part in the plan and ask for a still increased share. The whole cooperative movement is moving forward and needs only adequate trained, competent, and honest leadership to bring it shortly into posses-

sion of the bulk of the trade of the country. Of the total trade of the Soviet Union for the year 1925-26, 76.3 percent was done by the government and the co-operatives as against 23.7 percent by private traders. The greater part of the private trade is done in the retail field where the small private merchant still has the majority of the business. But the chances are all weighted against him, with high taxes, severe credit terms, and unequal transportation privileges, all a handicap in his competition with the favored cooperatives. Only the greater energy of personal interest which the cooperative has not developed on the one hand, and the slow movement of the larger social body on the other, prevents the cooperative from immediately capturing the field. But certainly the great movement has come back in Russia and seems likely to go forward with leaps and bounds.

## CHAPTER VII

### POLITICS

#### THE VILLAGE MIR

IN practically all of the agricultural and general economic programs of the present government, we have observed that the systems have a basis in history and have not been foisted upon the people by *prikaz* (order) from the authorities. Likewise, for an understanding of the village soviet we must go back to the ancient mir or village council. Wallace writes, upon becoming acquainted with this institution in 1875, "In 'the great stronghold of Caesarian depotism and centralized bureaucracy' these communes, containing about five-sixths of the population, are capital specimens of representative constitutional government of the extreme democratic type." \* He explains that he is speaking of Constitution in the English and not the Continental sense. There were no written laws governing the conduct of the affairs of the mir, and nothing could have been more informal than their assemblies. But habit created a body of precedents which were rigorously enforced. Times of seeding, harvesting, and mowing were as inflexible as the laws of the Medes and Persians. Each village had its own inviolable method of dividing the land. The assemblies themselves were usually held out of doors because there was no other place to con-

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\* Wallace: *Russia*, p. 126.



tain the crowd. Each family might have a representative at the meeting, and if there were no man living to represent the house, even a woman might come and be heard with the attention due any householder. The village elder seems to have never sought the office, because it always carried more responsibility than reward. Parliamentary rules in the meeting were simple. Everybody talked on the subject in hand, and often two at once, until there seemed to be nothing more to be said. The elder would then appear from some place in the crowd and state the summary result of the discussion as the decision of the mir. If there were a close division, upraised hands were counted.

It must be remembered that these assemblies were not political in any wide sense. They were concerned merely with the division and cultivation of their own lands, the repair of a bridge, the building of a public bath house and other such practical problems. Their concern with taxes was only in regard to the equitable distribution of the village assessment which had been laid by the government and the landlord. Wallace likens the whole commune to an enlarged family. Certainly the activities of the council were largely household affairs.

We have already noted the place of the *zemstvo* in the march of events. This anomolous institution was an enlargement of the function of the mir to meet the needs of the conditions arising out of the Emancipation. The landlords remained, and the leadership of the *zemstvo* movement, which like the mir was concerned altogether with local and practical affairs, naturally fell into the hands of the more public-spirited or politically active members of the commune. Courts, taxes, police, and so on, continued to be the exclusive

machinery of the central government. But the village had learned to think of itself as an economic unit and was prepared by ancient practice to assume a part as a nucleus in the Soviet State when it arrived.

#### SOVIET ORGANIZATION

We shall not go into the structure of the Soviet State at length, since we are chiefly concerned with it as it functions in village management. It will be necessary only to recall the general outline.

Starting with the fundamental principle that it is a workers' and peasants' government, the franchise is given only to those who earn their living by their own labor. Private merchants, priests, small manufacturers, and the like are regarded as parasites and are not permitted to vote. The laboring group is used as the unit in voting instead of the geographical ward, so that in the city a worker votes at his factory or place of work, or a group of smaller shops unite to form one unit. In the village, however, practically all the inhabitants are farmers, and the geographical and labor boundaries coincide. In general the representation in the village soviet, or council, is based on the old system of hundreds, by which there is approximately one member for every hundred inhabitants. This body in turn sends delegates to the township or county council, which sends representatives to the gubernia or state assembly, and the gubernia finally selects representatives to go to the All Union Council of Soviets at Moscow.

Like all well organized parties, the Communists begin laying their plans and issuing instructions long before the elections. The elections in the village occur sometime in January or February. By the first of Decem-

ber the newspapers and farm journals are featuring articles dealing with the coming campaign. But there is a noticeable difference between campaign literature in Russia and America. The whole battle in the Soviet Union is waged around the promotion of an idea. The revolutionary class struggle is kept to the fore in every column, emphasized in every instruction issued from the Party centers. Since there are no state nor national elections as we know them, the entire campaign is centered in the local elections. As is well known, there are also no parties in the sense in which we are accustomed to them.

In *Izvestia* for December 5, 1926, the Central Executive Committee, through its president, Kalinin, himself from the peasantry, sounded the note to guide the coming elections in the village. He pointed to the necessity of strengthening the leadership of the proletariat in the village and bringing together the poor and middle-class peasant. To this end he recommended that care be taken to see that candidates are offered from these classes, from the farm laborers, and from the young people, including women.

*The Red Village*, the agricultural journal of the northwest district, carried as its leading article on the same date, "Election of the Soviet in the Village." This article observed that this would be the second campaign on the basis of the instructions of the Fourteenth Party Conference. The first of these campaigns, according to the author, brought out thirty to forty percent of the voters to the elections, while before that time there were often not more than seven to ten percent present. The farmer readers were urged to vote and take part in the village government rather than stay away and then criticize the soviet on the grounds

that they did not elect it. All of which sounds strangely like the annual laments at election time in the United States. The device on the banner raised by this editor was, finally, "A farm-laborer, poor-farmer, middle-farmer union under the leadership of the Communist Party against the kulaks." For, according to him, and to general reports, these kulaks have a dangerous tendency to "fall into the soviet." On the basis of such recommendations and the direct instructions sent out by the party, the county and local party workers set about preparing their slates and planning the elections.

#### A VILLAGE ELECTION

I was present at the election at Maslov Kut in 1926, and even voted, for all resident workers of the country above the age of eighteen are eligible to vote, whether actually Russian citizens or not.

The village does not possess a building large enough to hold all the possible voters, so, in good old style, the election was held in the courtyard of the soviet headquarters. The election officials, with the president of the soviet presiding, took their places on the veranda and the two or three hundred voters gathered in the yard beneath. The total electorate of the village is 1,767, of which 831 are men and 936 women. By a liberal estimate, not more than twenty percent of this number were present at the election, among whom a good sprinkling of women was noticeable. As soon as the registration of those present was verified, the meeting opened with a speech by an organizer from the county center. The visitor urged the selection of good honest workers to the soviet and particularly asked that some women be elected. The business proper then got under way.

A caucus had previously prepared a complete list of candidates for the thirty-six places on the soviet, and this slate was first offered *in toto* to the assembly. With very slight parley this overture was almost unanimously rejected, and it was decided to make nominations from the floor, or, in this case, the ground. One by one the names were shouted up to the secretary who entered them as candidates. Sometimes a few identifying remarks were made, but for the most part all of those suggested were well known and needed no such introduction. The decks being thus cleared for action, the crowd settled into its sheep-skin coats and began the business of voting.

The tall, tubercular looking young president, whom I admired from the beginning for his patience and skill in handling the crowd, was unanimously reelected to his position. The visiting Party organizer was made an honorary member of the soviet, a custom sometimes also practiced in the case of a visiting foreigner whom a city may wish to honor. This done, the election proper was started.

The wish of the voter, as of old, is expressed by the raising of the hand. Nearly a hundred years ago the Czar's government attempted to introduce the ballot box in the village assemblies, but the peasants called it "playing marbles" and would have nothing to do with it. Again the soviets have simply used an ancient custom and have not invented one for the occasion. It is true that this open method of voting makes clear the political persuasions of the voters. But in this instance it seemed to deter freedom of expression very little. The little bloc of richer peasants voted together as a man. The few women stood manfully by the members of their sex who were nominated. The whole yard turned

against the candidates offered from the workers of the sovhoz, reflecting clearly the effects of the land dispute between the village and the government farm which had been hanging in the courts for many months.

Hour after hour the process moved on in its Russian way. As in the old village mir, discussion ran free and high, while the wise young president waited for the proper moment to shout *tische, tovarshie*, "Silence, comrades," and put the vote. At times a candidate was asked to mount the veranda so that he might be seen by all. One was pronounced too young. Others were refused election on the basis of their previous records. The kulaks voted solidly against the women. But one jolly electioneer near me shouted, "Come on, let's vote for the women. I have nothing against the women. I rather like the girls!" My own political enthusiasm waned after two or three hours of shifting from one foot to the other in the January snow, but the villagers shrugged their shoulders deeper into their sheepskin coats, slapped their hands together and used the rest of the midwinter day to select the whole quota of candidates and the auditing committee, which by law must be chosen separately at the time of the general election. The final result showed that of the thirty-six members elected to the soviet three were women, five Communists and the remainder non-party peasants of the village.

This village council meets regularly twice a month for the conduct of regular business. It divides itself into three main sections, Land and Taxes, Cultural Activities and Public Works. As far as possible a choice is given the members as to the section in which they will serve for their term of office. The daily decisions are made by a presidium, in the case of Maslov Kut composed of five members, elected by the soviet. The office work

and the detailed administration is performed by the president, the secretary and two clerks. These four workers receive salaries. The ordinary member of the soviet receives no remuneration.

In addition to the regular work of the sections of the soviet, such other commissions as are necessary are selected from the public-spirited citizens of the village and the various organizations. Maslov Kut, for instance, has commissions dealing with orphans and widows, a Sanitary Commission, a Statistical Commission, whose important business it is to keep track of the acreage sown in the village, the probable yield, and so on; a Revision Commission for the settlement of disputes between the tax gatherers and citizens and the like; and the Auditing Commission which has already been mentioned. In the Leningrad Gubernia I found seven small villages, the largest of which has forty houses, grouped into one political unit with a soviet of eight members and a similar list of committees.

In case of the necessity of undertaking any public work of an important nature, the whole village electorate may be again called together as a sort of enlarged soviet. I remember one such outdoor meeting which was called in Maslov Kut to discuss ways and means of repairing the school buildings of the village. I also remember that when a football, kicked by a youngster in the village square, accidentally smashed the glass of the picture of an ikon over the church gate, business was temporarily suspended until there was assurance that the glass would be replaced the next day.

On the whole, one is impressed with the essential democracy of these town-hall meetings, and is certainly not aware of any intimidation on the part of the authorities. There is an intimacy about the smaller unit

of the village with its old entrenched families that makes little political hookwinking possible. The greatest defect continues to be indifference on the part of the voters, but even this is growing less, if the reports of the newspapers are to be believed. Certainly the great emphasis on getting out the vote does not argue for the widely believed fiction that the Communists are afraid of the will of the peasants. The daily conduct of public business is the only form of politics in which the peasant is interested. His participation will consequently be enlarged as the machinery of government is still further simplified and brought near to his daily life. This seems to be a task in which the present government is seriously engaged.

#### THE SOVIET AT WORK

The county or township center is, naturally, the seat of the more specialized functions of the villages. Here is found the surveyor, the agronom, the superintendent of schools, the county court, and so on. To the American, the maddening aspect of the operations of any of these departments is the endless amount of red tape that accompanies them and the absolute indifference to time involved. But if such writers as Wallace are to be believed as well as all the other time-worn tales of Russia's general tempo, this is, again, no new phenomenon. The Revolution has simply added the element of inexperience to the already deadly procedure of folios of documents, checking and re-checking, seals and signatures, which has always accompanied the simplest official undertaking.

One of the most interesting aspects of local government is the administration of justice. The chief cases



are tried at the larger centers of county or gubernia, but the "people's judge" also makes periodic visits to the larger villages for the hearing of petty cases. Here again the whole proceeding is marked by intimate simplicity. A list of jurors is chosen from the citizens of the village to serve for a year, and they are then selected in alphabetical order for the sessions of the court as they occur. In the village trials, two jurors always sit with the judge who makes the third in the decisions.

Our county in the Caucasus was blessed with a circuit judge who combined a sense of justice and humor. His courts were always crowded. I recall one case, in which it was endeavored to determine the paternity of a child born to a young unmarried mother, when it was as difficult to crowd into the little village club room as to find admittance to a divorce case in Chicago. For hour after hour judge, jury and lawyers threaded their way through the mazes of conflicting and boldly contradicting testimony to a satisfactory end, while the serious young village policeman often vainly shouted *tische* (quiet) at the amused audience, composed largely of curious young people.

The most amazing part of the administration of justice is the casual manner of arrest and the nature of the jails. A classic instance of this among the American group of the Reconstruction Farms at Maslov Kut is that of the arrest of "Huck Finn," as the energetic young tramp in charge of the workers' club was dubbed. As many a young man in his circumstances has done in all lands, finding himself in hard straits at one time, he appropriated some of the funds of the club. He admitted the accusation when he was confronted and awaited arrest. But when the police came to take him, he was acting as stage manager for a play which was

about to be given and flatly told the officer that it was impossible for him to go. The play could not go on without him. And the officer kindly went back to the county seat and came again a day or so later after the play was over.

Another young blood of the village who drove a tractor for the sovhoz on finding himself in the local jail one morning after a too hilarious evening over the bottle, rose up like the young giant he was, broke open the wooden door of the makeshift cell and went back to work. When the authorities found him he avowed he meant no discourtesy, but it was in the midst of harvest season and he simply could not be bothered with jail when he was so urgently needed. The case was indefinitely deferred.

The highest penalty of the courts for all crimes, except those against the State, is ten years. In most cases it is very much less, and often is a deferred sentence which does not involve going to prison at all. The local jails are guarded by peasants who take turns at the business, thus again domesticating and bringing close to the life of the village even this ancient symbol of State power. Where long sentences in district prisons are imposed, the prison is made an educational institution as well as a place of incarceration, the theory behind the whole system being corrective rather than punitive.

#### THE COMMUNISTS AT WORK

The question naturally arises, What is the place of the Communist Party in the political and administrative life of the village, and how does such a small group maintain its leadership? The total membership of the Party in all the Soviet Union is not more than a million,

and of these a very small proportion is found in the village. In Maslov Kut, for instance, with a population of 3,600, including 1,767 voters, there were in 1926 but five full-fledged members and ten candidates. In the township Gorodetski of Leningrad Gubernia, of the population of seven thousand, there were but five party members and fifteen candidates. In many villages there is not a single Communist.

First of all, we must recall that the Communist Party is not a party in the commonly accepted political sense at all. In the beginning of its history, and until it came into power in 1917, it was an underground revolutionary movement. To have membership in it was to court exile, imprisonment, or worse. After the turn of fortune which brought it into complete control of a great country, the situation was reversed. Membership now meant favors, position, power, and there were any number of self-seekers who crept into the ranks in the early days of the Revolution. This brought about a great party "cleansing" which set the example for continued periodic purgings. Even now, however, plenty of self-seekers are ready to slip into the fold. The Party still conceives of its task as revolutionary and far from complete. Discipline and unity it guards as its life. No parallel of organization occurs to one so quickly as that of a religious order. Candidates are kept on probation for periods ranging from six months to two years. Meantime, their conduct and attitudes are watched and they are instructed in the Marxian faith and Leninist tactics. Once a member of the Party, the individual becomes a part of the great mobile instrument by the exercise of the severest discipline. He is sent wherever the Party commands. He cannot change his work or place of residence without permission of his Party. He

is not permitted to receive a salary of more than \$112.50 per month. Such disciplined, instructed and presumably enthusiastic leaders are then placed in the great mass of workers and peasants in the form of nuclei, or small groups, which act as propaganda centers and teaching agencies, as well as reliable instruments for all other work of the Party.

As the significance of the village in the national economy became increasingly evident, the slogan, "Faces toward the Village," was adopted. At first the Party commandeered members to go into the villages from the cities. Here places were found for them in the appointive positions of the local soviets, the labor organizations, or the more direct branches of government administration. Once in the village they were expected to make a place for themselves in the esteem of the citizens. But it was soon discovered that men so commandeered often had no real knowledge of the peasant, nor any real interest in the work they were given to do, so that the very effect obtained was opposite to the one desired. Consequently, village work was placed on a volunteer basis. But the method of locating remains the same, and the success of the plan depends more than ever upon the ability of the individual to make a place for himself.

The group of Communists in a given village are organized and meet regularly twice a month. An interesting discussion of the activities of these nuclei appeared in the Moscow *Pravda*, the organ of the Party, for November 19, 1926, entitled, "New Forms of Party Work in the Village." In general, the practical active work of aiding in securing more farm machinery, promoting cooperative organizations, fighting the local power of the kulaks, and helping in the mutual aid societies is here

praised over against mere concern with theoretical political discussion.

Two examples are cited to show the needed type of work. The nucleus of the village of Nekludov, Ulyanov Gubernia, with a membership of twelve, is taken first. The members are, for the most part, county employees. They had met often during the previous year.

To see what kind of questions they considered let us take some extracts from the agenda:

(1) Proposition: May there be in a Soviet Republic the growth of anarchy?

Decision: In a Soviet Republic there can be no growth of anarchy.

(2) Question: Is it possible to establish socialism in one country?

Decision: Upon hearing the discussion it was collectively agreed that socialism can be established in one country only by the help of foreign workers.

(3) Heard: A report on the program and regulations of the Party point by point.

Decided: That in all points the group remains satisfied.

"This shows," the writer of the article believes, "that the Nekludov Nucleus practically did not consider local questions at all, and clearly was cut off from the peasant."

Here is the report of the Medaev Nucleus in the same country:

"The Medaev Nucleus for the period from January to July, 1926, performed the following work:

(1) Led four campaigns for the celebration of "Red Army Day," "International Woman's Day,"

Twenty-Year Jubilee of the 1905 Revolution, and a day of "Lenin Facts."

(2) Raised the slogan "Facing the Village," and presented it before local meetings of the citizens.

(3) The work of the Pioneers (the Boy and Girl Scout movement of the Communists) and the Young Communists presented through meetings of various local organizations.

(4) Preparation of delegates to party conferences.

(5) Consideration of the decisions of the Fourteenth Party Conference.

(6) Led campaigns for International Relief of Political Prisoners and for Avio-Chemics. Delivered various reports."

This report is commended as an example of the kind of activities and discussions which should engage the attention of the Party Nuclei of the villages, a program which differs somewhat from the activities of the ordinary county Republican or Democratic Club, as can be seen at a glance.

The two youth movements mentioned in the report above are a part of the whole educational scheme for the preparation of future Party members and leaders. The *Komsomol*, or Communist Union of Youth, forms an important adjunct and aid to the program of the Party, as well as playing an active part in the social life of the new village, as we shall notice later. Of the two million members of this organization, 900,000 are in the villages. The brief article devoted to this movement in *The Farmer's Calendar* says that its chief object in the village is to infuse "the mass of non-party peasant youth with the spirit of Communism." The

members are expected to take an active part in the social and cooperative activities of the village and to aid the Party Nucleus in its work. They are used effectively as leavening centers in the Red Army. All of the young men recruited for Russia's Navy are from the Komsomol. The youth, too, have their discipline. The group of Maslov Kut, I remember, had among their commandments the forbiddance of drunkenness and the wearing of jewelry, while smoking was frowned upon. Contrary to the usual connotation of such prohibitions, church attendance was also strictly forbidden.

Not only are the Communists subject to the discipline of their own organization, but they are periodically subjected to the merciless scrutiny and criticism of the public. During my residence in Maslov Kut, I witnessed a very interesting direct appeal to the people by the Party combined with a local Party cleansing process. This occasion was the open meeting called by the Party Review Commission of the Ter District in the village club room in March, 1926.

When the crowd had assembled, as usual an hour or more after the time announced, the curtain rolled back dramatically to disclose the three members of the commission with the local Party secretary seated at the inevitable red-draped table. The leader of the commission, a stolid, deliberate Slav with a round shaved head, made the first speech. The purpose of this meeting, he said, was twofold: that the Party might learn the will of the people, and that the local members might be subjected to public criticism and the unworthy ones eliminated. His approach reminded me of a preacher. He quoted Lenin with unction. He pointed out that the Communists were expected not only to be good citizens,

but examples of virtue and social activity in the village. He invited questions and criticisms and sat down amid silence which was followed by a few harmless questions.

The next speaker, however, a swarthy Armenian with quick speech and nervous gestures, was different. His address was full of wit and keen thrusts, and bristled with pertinent facts. He did not spare his comrades who, when in office, thrust portfolios under their arms and strut. He explained the international trade condition precipitated by the grain situation and admitted a crisis in the value of the rouble. He invited the widest criticism of the government, local and national, the Party members, the cooperatives. It was to be a period of purging. His speech was punctuated with laughter and he sat down in the midst of applause. Then the questions began to roll in, some written and passed up to the platform, others asked directly from the floor.

The perennial question of the disputed lands which had years ago been awarded to the Government Farm appeared. The current price of milling was criticized. The management of the cooperative came in for a round of abuse. Graybearded peasant and Communist Youth each had his say. The oldsters accused the Komsomols of being "hooligans," a word which the Russians have transliterated to denote general rowdyism or outright violent lawlessness. Then, not content with these hours of open criticism, private conferences were asked from any citizen who might have a complaint to lodge against the Party members or candidates. Strictest secrecy and privacy were promised for these seances, and doubtless some advantage was taken of the offer. As a result of the meeting and the private conferences, the Party leaders had a real finger on the pulse of their local constituency, and the local nucleus lost one member who



had been too much given to his bottle and too little to his work as a mill weighman.

In accounting for the power of the communists among the great mass of peasants, three or four factors are to be considered. In the first place, the strength of the Party is far more than its numbers indicate. Millions of persons can be found throughout Russia who are in general sympathy with the aims of the government and the Party but have never applied for membership, either because they have no interest in politics as such, or because they are unwilling to submit to the discipline required of its members, or because there are certain points of its doctrine which they are not yet ready to accept. In the second place, the Russian farmer, like most farmers of the world, has little interest in politics. He has a natural suspicion of all government, and if he possesses any latent philosophy at all, it is basically anarchistic. He likes that government best which governs him least. True, he is taking more interest as the business of government is made more practical, and is brought nearer home. But in the meantime the Party Nucleus of the village is a highly organized and disciplined group operating among an indifferent and unorganized mass of peasantry and consequently strong out of all proportion to its size.

So long as no measures are taken which are highly prejudicial to the economic welfare of the villagers, they will be content to sow and reap and go about their daily life, letting those who are interested in the business run the government. The corollary to this proposition is that the Communists are actually governing in accordance with the general will of the people of the villages. The leaders are alive to the demands of this mass and have often made changes accordingly. Witness the

alterations in the land laws which have been noted. Remember also the inner Party struggle of 1925-26 which was essentially precipitated by the problem of how far the farmer might be pushed for taxes with impunity.

#### TAXES

The agricultural tax is the point at which village politics and economics meet, and where the peasant feels most keenly the hand of the powers that be.

It must be remembered from the outset that the whole apparatus of State during this reconstruction period has had to rest chiefly on the back of the peasant. Following the troublous times of the civil war and its grain requisitions from the peasants in order that the country might not starve, the agricultural tax was levied in kind and amounted to about fifteen percent of the harvests. The factories, idle and neglected during the civil war, had to be rebuilt. The railways had to be overhauled. Mines flooded and destroyed by the enemy had to be put into commission. Agriculture, reduced to a shadow of its pre-war self, was the only source of support for the workers in this almost miraculous task of making something out of nothing. The industry of the country, which now became a government undertaking, not only gave no profit but was at first a heavy liability. The farm paid the bills and received little or nothing in return in the way of manufactured goods.

By 1925, however, the stupendous task of industrial recovery had almost been accomplished, and industry had shown an even greater percentage of gain than agriculture. The government trade and industrial monopolies began to show significant profits which per-

mitted the lowering of the direct agricultural tax, while at the same time the budget of the Soviet Union was constantly increased. The Assistant Commissar of finance, reporting to the Central Executive Committee on the budget for Russia proper in November, 1926, showed that the average tax per peasant household in 1924-25 was 14.2 roubles, in 1925-26 9.3 roubles, and for 1926-27 increased again to 11.9 roubles, but is still below the average of two years before. Meanwhile the budget of the Soviet Union grew from a billion, four hundred and eighty million roubles in 1922-23 to a round four billion in 1925-26, allowing for a reserve of a hundred million roubles.

These wonders have been accomplished by a program of rigid economy, often at the expense of fearfully underpaid employees, especially among the professional classes such as physicians and teachers. The budgets of all departments have been painfully limited to make possible the speedy development of industry. Only eleven percent of the budget of 1925-26 was appropriated to the support of the administrative machinery.

The plan of the agricultural tax, like all other plans of the Soviet Government, is a fluid one, and is changed from year to year as needs are observed for alteration. The significant and much welcomed change introduced with the coming of the NEP and an established currency was the introduction of a single and definite tax to cover both local and Union budgets instead of the uncertain special levies of the disorganized period following the Revolution. The tax which we found in operation in the village in the summer of 1925 was based on the acreage of arable land, varied by the number of members of the family. Live stock was counted in terms of dessiatines of land for the purpose of taxation.

A horse, for instance, was counted as .7 of a dessiatine, a cow .6 of a dessiatine, and an ox .35 of a dessiatine.

The local organs present their departmental needs to the next highest step in the system; these are incorporated in the Gubernia or district budget after revision, and so on until the total Union budget is finally determined, based on the needs of the various departments and upon the state of the national economy. The meeting of the needs of the various departments is not yet in sight. Indeed, considering the breadth of the functions of the Soviet State, the demands of its departments will be constantly expanding. The State is the people at work at the business of social production in the scheme of socialism, with its vast undertakings of public works, as well as the conduct of the ordinary affairs of public education, public health, and general administration. The budget, therefore, is built on careful estimates of the probable crops, income from the State industry, State trade, and so on. That such estimates may be miscalculated is seen in the near crisis precipitated by the failure of the grain campaign of 1925, and it was for this reason among others that, by heroic efforts, a balance of one hundred million roubles was created to give greater elasticity.

It can be seen at once that the statistical commission of the village government plays a really important part in the whole economic scheme, especially in the levying of taxes. Their reports not only affect the possibilities of the budget but determine the proportionate weight of the tax upon a given section. The valuation per dessiatine of land, the norm mentioned above, is divided into nine general categories, in accordance with the expected productivity of the gubernia or large agricultural district. The gubernia, receiving its share of the total

tax, subdivides it among the counties, still on the basis of the statistical material provided by the local committees, and the county again divides its own share among its villages in accordance with the estimated value of their crops.

The schedule is so arranged that the richer peasant with more stock or with land rented from his neighbors pays not only more in proportion to the increase of his acreage, but the scale per dessiatine is an increasing one for the upper figures. As an example of the working of the tax, we found in Maslov Kut that a middle-class peasant of the village with six members in his family, one horse, one ox, fifteen dessiatines (forty acres) of arable land, and five dessiatines of meadow, paid a tax of \$31.48. About two-thirds of the total tax collected from the southeast division of Russia, which includes the rich grain section, went to the center for the year 1925-26. Of the total agricultural tax of the Soviet Union for the same year, in round numbers 235 million roubles, 100 million went to local needs.\*

The schedule for the following year, 1926-27, was again changed. A general effort was made to shift the burden still more to the richer peasants and kulaks, and the basis was changed from that of a near single tax on land to a more outright form of income tax. Orchards, vegetable gardens, vineyards, and such intensively used land was put into separate categories, and it was endeavored to discover other forms of income in the village not directly connected with the cultivation of the land. The general tax, as has been noted, was increased about ten percent, but by a new distribution the local share in the budget was increased twenty percent.

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\* *Farmer's Calendar*, 1927.

The class significance of the tax should also be noticed. In accordance with the plan, about twenty-five percent of all the peasant households are completely exempted on the basis of poverty. This status is calculated generally on the amount of livestock, particularly working animals, for the land distribution is already equalized. Thus, according to the figures of the Treasury of the Russian Union for 1925-26, fifteen percent of the village population are without animals of any kind, while sixty percent have not more than two head. On the other hand, fifteen percent of the upper categories, according to figures used by Rykov before the Fifteenth Party Conference, pay forty-seven percent of the taxes. An article in the Leningrad *Pravda* for January 12, 1927, discussing the question of still further change in the tax system, points out that about twenty percent of the households in the Leningrad Gubernia were exempted, and that the levy is made on the following increasing scale: Incomes to 150 roubles, 4¾ percent; to 200 roubles, 5¼ percent; to 300 roubles 5¾ percent; to 450 roubles 8 percent; to 600 roubles, 10½ percent; and over 600 roubles, 14 percent.

The tax returns reveal clearly the wealth of different sections of the country. I found, for example, that the richest farmer of the village of Maslov Kut in the rich grain district of the southeast, who possesses two horses, a tractor, three cows, and twenty sheep, and had rented about a hundred acres of government land, paid a tax of 245.79 roubles. On the other hand, one of the two richest peasants in a small village of Leningrad Gubernia was paying but thirty roubles as a total tax. At the same time, while the North Caucasus section was sending two-thirds of its total tax to the center,

this county of the Leningrad Gubernia, having an average household tax of six roubles, had its deficit made up to the extent of fifty percent of the local taxes.

Notwithstanding the fact that the single agricultural tax is expected to cover local as well as State and national budgets, we discover that villages all over the country raise self-imposed taxes for various and often curious purposes. Many of these cases were reported in the spirited discussion of the agricultural question which centered in the Party conflict of the Fifteenth Conference in 1926. *Izvestia* reported a number of speeches on the subject on October 30th of that year. One speaker declared that:

"In one district of the Voronez Gubernia, the self-imposed tax amounted to thirty-five percent of the regular agricultural tax, in another it was as high as seventy percent."

"True," the same speaker points out, "the volost budgets continue to grow . . . but they do not yet meet the full cultural-economic requirements of the village. Hence the self-imposed tax." "And," he points out still further, "a significant part of this 'good will' tax goes to the payment of village soviet workers."

A representative from Saratov Gubernia on the Volga enumerates among the objects for which taxes are raised: the hire of shepherds, repair of bridges, fixing wells, repairing schools, maintaining fire-fighting apparatus. Another speaker cited cases of special taxes "for maintaining the 'Te Deum' and transport of the priest, a treat for the mowers at the beginning of the haying, fifty copeks per chimney for the maintenance of the village watchman." One village even reported a tax plainly, "for maintenance of the clergy."

It will be remembered that the "Opposition," as the

Trotsky group in the party conflict was called, proposed to tax the farmer further in order that the development of industry might be speeded up still more rapidly. Rykov, in speaking on this subject before the Party Conference on October 30th, produced, as an illustration of his contention that further help could not be expected from this source, the case of a farmer in Moscow Gubernia. This peasant had an income of 1,248 roubles. His agricultural tax was 253 roubles, which it was estimated would be increased to a round four hundred roubles by the addition of insurance and self-imposed taxes. In other words, about thirty-two per cent of his total income was swallowed up in taxes. "Besides this," adds Rykov, "peasants on the whole are crying out at the high prices of commercial articles."

The Party Conference of 1926 summarized the attitude of the victorious majority on this subject in these words in the resolution dealing with agriculture and the peasantry:

"The attempt to regard the peasant merely as an object of taxation, in order by means of excessive taxes and the increasing of retail prices to raise exceptional capital from the farmer, must inevitably stop the progress of the productive power of the village, diminish the commodities of agriculture, and produce the menace of a rupture of the union of the working class and the farmer."

#### WHAT DOES THE PEASANT THINK?

It seems plain that, however inarticulate the patient peasant, his wants are made known and become the basis for action. My own experience is that while the peasant finds particular causes for grumbling against the powers that be, and pointed remarks about Com-



munists and the Soviet are not rare, yet when he is pressed to a general attitude, he will invariably choose the present government in preference to the old regime.

I have encountered few more frank discussions of the government and particularly the village soviet than those published in the letters of peasants appearing in *Izvestia* on the occasion of the ninth anniversary of the Revolution, in 1926. It is patent that *Izvestia*, the organ of the government, would print nothing counter-revolutionary, but the breadth of criticism published here is refreshing, and the notes ring true to the soil from which they sprang. I select two from the half page of the paper devoted to such letters:

“Work Not Yet Properly Arranged”

The work of the Township Executive Committees began to improve from the moment of free elections. But the work is not yet properly arranged, because in the local points here, there, and everywhere, the rich element of the population acts as a brake. The organization of the mutual aid committees is weak. Among the greater part of the population they are not yet established, and where they are they are under the pressure of the kulaks and cannot develop their work to the full breadth.

Middle Peasant, Shutov;  
New Archangel, Ryazan Gubernia.

Finally this gem under the title:

“All the Same—It’s a Good Government”

About the village soviets of other villages I don’t know, but about our own I can tell you. Our

soviet president works very poorly. There are very few conferences of the village soviet. In the preparation of the tax list, he invited no one to help him, and even did not invite members of the soviet. He is often drunk. There are many moonshiners, but the president and secretary run with them and gather, as they say among themselves, for "a little party." We see that the soviet power is properly planning affairs, but our president understands this badly. Look at our county central committee—there is order. There they tell you everything and do things quickly. The court also works all right, only it drags out the work a good deal, but they judge, you may say, all right. And there is this bad thing, too, the hooligans are increasing very much, and the taxes are pretty high, too.

All the same—it's a good government.

Middle Peasant, Sigunov,  
Village Yacinok, Brayanskoi Gubernia.

And Sigunov, I think, sums up the general peasant attitude, "There are a lot of things wrong, and the taxes are pretty high—but the government is not so bad."

## CHAPTER VIII

### SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

It is a generally accepted sociological doctrine that the use of leisure is one of the best indices of cultural status. Let us look, then, at the life of the village at rest and at play. In what way, if any, are the new economic forms affecting the social and cultural life of the people, especially the young people? What of education, morals, manners? How has the church fared in the village? These are the questions that have naturally caught the imagination and interest of most observers of the New Russia. In the end, it is these results that most concern the prophets of the new order. In the feverish period of revolution, and in the little less trying days of reconstruction, there has not been much time for the elaboration of this superstructure. It has been an economic struggle, pure and simple. But in spite of all handicaps of poverty, the most widespread effort in the world at thoroughly modern education has been launched. Reading rooms and club rooms have been introduced into the most remote villages of the vast land, the far-flung organization of the Communist Youth is carrying its ideas of a liberated world into the mass of peasant fixity, and the march of the tractor and mechanized life in general into the fastnesses of the steppe is bringing inevitably in its train the impact of the West which the leaders of less than a century ago so zealously guarded from the gates of Russia.

## THE CHURCH

I have already indicated, in the chapter descriptive of the physical aspects of the village, that, photographically, it is essentially what it was a hundred years ago. So, too, in spite of the new invasions, the old social mores cling. Central in this social scheme, as it is central in the architectural structure of the village, is the church. The completeness with which this ancient institution encompasses every move in the life of the individual from the day of his birth to his death, and even after death pursues him with the prayers and candles of his family, is nothing short of marvelous. The role it formerly played in the social and even economic activities of the village community was hardly less thorough. Nor are such centuries of custom thrown off in a day like an outworn coat. Indeed, even outworn coats have been particularly prized in Russia in these last few years. The times of plowing, seeding, haying, and harvesting are still so much regulated by the old church holidays that this custom was given me by one of the most intelligent priests of Leningrad as one of the chief reasons for not adopting the new calendar. I have seen the horses ridden down to the river for the annual blessing, led by priest and people with ikons and cross. I saw no longer than six months ago a procession led into the fields with cross and banners and holy pictures to pray for rain in time of a drouth. The village church bells still ring on sundry and all occasions to call the devout to prayers. The priests pass unmolested through the streets with flowing gowns and uncut hair to baptize the infants, marry the youth, or bury the dead. Pious old folk still cross themselves unabashed in the village

square before the holy pictures painted on the church or hung over its gates.

Notwithstanding the ease and simplicity of the present civil marriage arrangement, every open season for weddings in the church calendar finds the priest busy with ceremonies. The young bride still insists on her ring and veil. She is still willing to endure the two hours of ritual with its candles and crowns, and quite ready to solemnly promise to be obedient and fruitful, for the sake of a greater sense of sanctity and security it gives her. The husband, too, has not erased from his mind the fact that the wife is an additional worker added to the family resources more securely by such a ceremony. During the recent widespread discussion of a proposal to amend the laws governing the family relations, which has grown out of great abuse of the present divorce regulations, a villager wrote to one of the papers that the peasant wants, literally, "a hard wife, and a hard chervonetz," or, in other words, a stable wife and a stable currency.

The church holidays, too, are still occasions for great festivities in the villages. In the case of the more important dates, the government has been compelled to conform, and can only comfort itself in setting up a propagandist program of some sort through the Komsomols or the local Party group as a counter attraction. But the older workmen will often absent themselves from their jobs, even on church occasions not included in the twelve legal holidays sanctioned by the calendar. The day of the patron saint of the local church is always an especially gay occasion. Relatives and friends from all the neighboring villages come from miles around to attend the service, and especially to wine and dine with their hosts among the congregation. Easter continues,

in spite of all the new Red days, the greatest holiday of the year. Whatever the occasion may be, the festival is invariably accompanied by a great deal of drunkenness. Toward the end of any holiday it is common to meet many an "uncle measuring the road," as the children shout at them, or hilarious groups in the happy singing stage which the Russian always reaches when well in his cups.

The village needs little excuse, however, for taking a drink. Perhaps it is well to say a word here concerning the general question of alcoholism and its effect on the peasant. The alcoholic content of liquor has been gradually restored, and complete control of the manufacture and sale of beverages by the government is again in operation. Vodka with a forty percent test can now be purchased over any counter at the government wine shops, while wine and beer are offered to the thirsty in endless quantity on every side. The Russian peasant and worker have always had a reputation as hard drinkers, and the prohibition of the war period brought in its train the usual home brew products, which, according to official estimates, wasted vast quantities of grain, produced an inferior quantity of liquor, and robbed the needy State of a large source of revenue. I was forcibly struck by the latter aspect of the case several months ago when I heard the report of the local financial secretary before the Central Committee of one of the counties of Leningrad Gubernia for the year 1925-26. According to this statement, the income from the liquor taxes of the county was greater than the total agricultural tax for the same territory. Fair-minded witnesses tell me that drunkenness is still not so common as before the war, but it has certainly greatly increased since the prohibition period. At the

same time a steady propaganda is carried on by the Department of Health, the industrial unions, and the young people's organizations against alcohol. Posters flame its dangers. Newspapers and orators inveigh against it. The Party is severe in its condemnation of insobriety among its members, and lends the weight of its condemnation to the general program against drunkenness. Still, drinking goes steadily on. Church holidays continue to be among the greatest occasions for a spree. Whatever may have been the effect of the Orthodox Church on the lives of its believers in other respects, it seems to have made little or no impression upon them in the cultivation of restraint in this habit.

I have said that the church continues in the village with all its ceremonials, but the most casual observer cannot fail to note that it is losing its hold on the present generation. Younger children are taken to church by their parents, but with the exception of occasional visits on great holidays or a wedding, young people do not go to church. The priests are themselves among the first to bitterly complain of this, and intelligent believers in the church admit it. Part of this defect is, no doubt, due to the general spirit of the times. A long conversation I had with the priest of our village in the North Caucasus rang strangely familiar in its plaint of the depravity of the local youth and their certain trend toward the devil. Except for the language and the setting, it might have been a conversation at the parish study of any village in the United States.

Certain it is that this new generation of Russia is being subjected on every side, by school, press, and platform, to the most advanced materialistic explanations of life, and utter denial of the supernatural, on which the whole Orthodox Church is built from foun-

dation to the highest dome. For the traditionally mystic Russian there is left little middle ground between blind faith and utter disbelief. The movement within the church, which at first gave some hope of a real inner reformation, proved to be little more than a mere political struggle for leadership. With the exception of certain parts of Siberia, the so-called Living Church never gained a following in the village. The local parish, cut off from the rest of the church, without the supervision of any far-reaching ecclesiastical organization and without journals, goes on in its ancient way. Excluding small groups of students in Moscow and Leningrad, which might be so designated, there are no seminaries for the training of new priests. There is a lack of qualified priests in the villages, and at the same time there can be found rows of priestly beggars in the churches of Leningrad, who, according to reliable information, have refused rural assignments.

The *sectanti*, as the protestant groups are called, have, on the other hand, actually increased in strength since the Revolution, and the leaders of the Evangelical sect whom I interviewed regard the future with great hope. This sect, with a following of more than a million, publishes a paper, conducts a preachers' training school, holds its national and regional conferences with the consent of the government, and recently published the first edition of the Bible in the new orthography and without the imprimatur of the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church. All printing, however, is done by the government presses and under the eye of censors who are careful to see that the articles published are purely religious, in the narrow sense of the word, and contain no comments of a political nature. The Baptists, who also have a large following, and the numerous other



smaller sects of the country are with few exceptions, living in even greater freedom than they enjoyed before the war. The sects flourish particularly in the villages and smaller towns. although their meetings can be found in the principal cities as well. In these faiths, again, the believer finds little latitude for reconciliation with the increasing scientific explanation of the phenomena of life. Their theology is marked by a literalistic fundamentalism, and their daily life is ruled by a strict Puritanism. Pre-millennialism is widespread, as might be expected among devout believers who have passed through the last decade in Russia.

It can certainly be said for the sectants, however, that their members are honest, sober, hard-working citizens. They are usually good farmers, and the Mennonite colonies of the south, as well as the scattered groups of some other sects which are experimenting in communal and collective agriculture, are real centers of agrarian education. Furthermore, their form of organization is more democratic, and their services are simplified and cleansed of most of the semi-idolatry which marks the ikon worship of the unenlightened villager. Their own cottage prayer-meeting type of worship is devoid of beauty and often highly emotional, but it has a spirit of sincerity which lends a certain dignity.

The government authorities, after the first few years of unsuccessful attempts at suppression and destruction of the church, chiefly through the agency of the Anti-Religion or literally "Godless" Society, discovered that frontal attacks were making martyrs where they wished to reveal fools. The tactics were changed. Interference with religious meetings was strictly forbidden. The Godless Society now confines itself to educational propaganda. It maintains a journal, promotes lectures,

study groups, debates, and every sort of activity that will spread disbelief in the supernatural and undermine the power of the church.

When we remember that the Orthodox Church was from time immemorial the arm of the autocratic state which the Revolution has overthrown, and that this same church officially anathematized the Revolution in its early days, it is not difficult to understand that the Soviet State is set against the remnants of this ancient power and regards it not only as an enslaving superstition, but as a definite enemy. The wonder is that in the face of such a feud the constitutional guarantees of religious freedom should be as sedulously kept as we find them today. Meanwhile, realizing that the roots of religion lie too deep for hope of immediate eradication, the sects are regarded as the least objectionable forms. They are even encouraged to grow by concessions and privileges as a thorn in the side of Orthodoxy. One of the more broad-minded Communists told me that if he had his way, he would plant a group of protestants in every village of the country and encourage the widest religious discussion.

The higher authorities are, generally speaking, not interested in religion one way or another, and are inclined to leave the problem to the gradual process of education, simply taking care to see that the religious organizations take on no political aspects. The local authorities, however, like provincial minds everywhere, do not always have a broad view of such problems. We had an interesting example of this in an experience with a group of Protestants who came to the Reconstruction Farms at Maslov Kut as students by a special arrangement with an American organization which was interested in this particular sect. The arrival of this

group of peasant Protestants at the Soviet Farm precipitated great excitement in the local Party nucleus. A few days later, an innocent religious discussion in the village square between two or three of these boys and some of the Orthodox churchmen led to the arrest of the Protestants and their summons to the county police headquarters for examination. I was present at the cross examination and heard the final instructions of the chief. The offenders were told that it was forbidden in that district to speak at any religious meeting without license, even to the extent of bringing greeting from one established religious meeting to another. Nor was discussion in groups of more than three permitted without similar license. They were told, however, that simple conversation on religious topics and their own private worship might be indulged in to their hearts' content.

Sometime afterwards, the situation was further complicated by the addition to the student group of a number of Komsomols from the Agricultural Academy at Moscow. But in the midst of the local dilemma a new assistant manager came to the Farms in the person of a Communist of many years' standing and a military record in the Civil War. He saw the whole thing at once in its broader outlines, and even sensed the humor of the situation. He quickly allayed the fears of the local authorities, and went so far as to recommend that the young Communists and the sectanti be thoroughly mixed for the benefit of both groups.

Thus, new forces are at work even in this ancient bulwark of stability, the church, partly as a result of the world movements that are touching all religious and ethical ideas, partly as the more direct outcome of Communist propaganda. Here again, one has the feel-

ing that the institution cannot remain the same. Whether it will be able to bend sufficiently to conform to the new order, or whether it will be broken in the process, will need the test of time. Meantime, the church remains the center of the social life and customs of the older culture of the village.

#### THE NARODNI DOM

In the same sense, the Narodni Dom, or People's House, is the center of the new culture that is being created out of revolutionary ideals. If by some stroke of luck the village possesses a building large enough to house them all together, you may find in this social center such institutions as the village theatre, the reading room and library, club rooms for the Komsomols and Pioneers, class rooms for the Liquidation of Illiteracy, and so on. Ordinarily, however, these various activities are scattered in smaller buildings about the village square. But, after all, housing is not the important thing. Public building must wait on prosperity. Far more interesting and significant is the functioning of the sundry organizations that center around this Narodni Dom.

Somewhere in every properly organized club room, of whatever kind, in every Narodni Dom, in every factory of Russia, at the fairs, often at the railway stations, can be found the shrine of Communism, the Lenin Corner. Here in some red-draped nook will be found a large portrait of Lenin or a statue of him. And in large letters on a banner flung across the wall, this legend, or another like it, will greet the visitor, "Lenin is dead, but Leninism lives." Everywhere texts from the writings of the great leader meet the eye. His life story

is told in pictures which carry him from childhood to the embalmed body lying in the tomb outside the Kremlin walls. Books from his own pen and books about him may be read in this "corner," or bought and carried home. This is the political center, the local hub of Communist propaganda. The remaining walls of the public buildings are hung with pictures of Marx and Engels and the lesser martyrs and heroes of the Revolution. The villages are particularly fond of hanging the picture of the village-bred president of the Central Executive Committee, Kalinin. If there still is vacant wall space it is plastered with vivid posters of many sorts. "Proletarians of the World, Unite!" rarely lacks a prominent place in large letters, challenging attention. All of which leaves the observer torn between the conviction that such unremitting and omnipresent advertising must soon make the ideas of Communism as well known as Ivory Soap and as indispensable and, on the other hand, the feeling that there is a grave likelihood of cheapening the message so freely broadcast.

Recognizing that the general interior decorations of all the rooms we may enter will center around these themes, let us examine the activities of the organizations so housed a bit more closely. To begin with the lighter side, we shall look at the *Nardom*, to use the still further shortened expression, as the home of the theatre. It is my confirmed opinion that all Russians are naturally orators and actors. Given a simple stage with an interior set and a canvas forest, a prompter's box and some painted burlap curtains, and with a week or less any village from the Caucasus to Archangel can produce a very creditable play. But to preserve the illusions the spectator must never sit too near the front. The prompter is one of the chief performers on whom much

of the success of the play depends. Little effort is wasted by the actors on the dull business of learning parts, but the prompter, from his sunken post in front, reads the lines while the players repeat them with such feeling and promptness that one seated in the rear scarcely notices the difference. The performances are frequently benefit affairs for one organization or another, but whatever the occasion, the theatre is usually packed to the doors, and since the season is always in the fall and winter, the atmosphere can usually be cut with a knife. The time of the curtain, like most times in Russia, is highly problematical and depends upon the convenience of both elements of the performance, cast and audience. But in this case it is the audience which usually gathers first and sits patiently on the backless benches to wait the rise of the curtain. In the meantime, unless rigid official oversight is exercised, the rooms will be filled with smoke, and the munching of sunflower seed, the peanut of Russia, will begin.

The play itself, I am afraid, has in these latter days been made too much a vehicle of propaganda for the cultivation of art for art's sake. But many of the newer ones are well written and have the virtue of dealing with themes that come close to the life of the people. Now and then a more ambitious local troupe will undertake a work of one of the older playwrights. Following the lead of the now famous players of that name in Moscow, hundreds of troupes of actors known as the Blue Blouse—the conventional dress of the worker—have sprung up all over the country. The performance of these players is a sort of variety show whose peculiar feature is the Living Newspaper, which presents in comical sketches comments on world and local events. Troupes of this kind from the larger

centers often go on tours through the villages of the district, where their local thrusts are sometimes delivered with more point than art.

I remember a locally produced farce, dealing with soviet divorce laws, which was received with great appreciation in one village. An old peasant and his wife fall into a little altercation such as might happen in the best of families, and, upon learning of the ease with which divorce can be obtained they resort at once to the village authorities and before they know it are divorced. Dedushka is greatly delighted to learn that he is now a free man, can marry again if he likes, has no more obligations to his wife, and so on. But when it is broken to him that she has the same rights as he in these respects, he is dumfounded. The upshot of the matter is that both of them are convinced that they have gone too far, and before they leave the office, they have been remarried.

The theatre, as we have already seen, is the courtroom as well. Furthermore, occasions such as those mentioned in the report of the village nucleus in the last chapter, Lenin Day, May First, International Woman's Day, and so on, are signals for oratory in this village center. While the *Kino*, as the Russian movie fan calls his theatre, flourishes in the cities and large centers of population, and Charlie and Doug and Mary are as well known as are the heroes of the Revolution, apparatus is still too expensive and scarce for this modern mania to have taken root in the village. But itinerating shows equipped with man-power dynamos visit even the remoter villages and are received with an enthusiasm which indicates the extent to which this institution may be expected to spread with the coming of electricity and prosperity to the farmer.

The radio, too, is slowly making its way among the peasants. In 1926 a *Peasant's Radio Magazine* was launched. Villages near the large cities rear their antennae to the sky in increasing numbers, while even the remoter centers where apparatus is more expensive are overcoming the difficulty by pooling resources through the organizations of the villages. It will probably be only a short time until the powerful station at Moscow will be able to flash its world news, agricultural information, and musical programs, nightly, to the farthest hinterlands of the Union.

Those who still feel that the chief Bolshevik means of conversion is the bayonet should let his imagination dwell on the network of reading rooms and libraries that cluster around the Nardoms of the country. In Archangelskoe County of the North Caucasus we found eight of the larger villages of the forty of the county equipped with reading rooms and libraries which are open every day and supplied with a librarian. The largest village has not only its central library but a branch as well. These centers are not only places for the distribution of books on all manner of themes, particularly agricultural and political, but they are information bureaus as well. In Maslov Kut, the librarian told me that even in August, the harvest season, he had supplied one hundred and ten villagers with various kinds of information concerning taxes, land laws, and so on. Villages which are not large enough to merit a regular reading room are supplied very often with a traveling library from the township center. I remember finding on one trip into a small village of the Leningrad Gubernia that the Komsomol daughter of my host was busy on a rainy Sunday morning distributing books at the school house where such a collection is stationed for



the use of small settlements that cluster around. It cannot be said, certainly, that the villagers are voluminous readers, but they are being subjected to a bombardment of books in a way before undreamed of in Russia, and little by little, as the pall of illiteracy is lifted, this steady fire of knowledge will have still more effect.

This battle with illiteracy goes on unremittingly. A widespread movement for adult education is carried on much along the lines of our Moonlight School system, under the high sounding title of the Society for the Liquidation of Illiteracy. This organization raises funds by lotteries, (a favorite scheme for all kinds of money-raising), direct appeals to the public, and the like, for the support of adult schools under the general supervision of the Department of Education. Classes are arranged to suit the convenience of the pupils, the women often coming in the daytime and the men in the evening. Sometimes they are held in the rooms of the Nardom, sometimes in the schoolrooms of the village. Here again the most discouraging obstacle is not the lack of funds or even of teachers, though both these needs are often felt. It is the apathy of this "dark people," as they are wont to call themselves. The enthusiastic young teachers often find that it is not enough to have a warm room, a teacher, and books to bring all the village thirsting to the fountain of enlightenment. I have seen the large group of a first night in such a school dwindle week after week to a mere handful and completely disappear before the winter was half done. Nevertheless, the battery fires away in concert with the other agencies against the crumbling walls of ignorance and indifference, which are slowly yielding.

Wherever there is found a group of hired laborers,

such as on a government farm or among the richer farmers, the labor union has its club, with lectures and regular meetings to discuss the problems of wages, working conditions, and the usual routine business of such an organization.

A Union-wide women's organization under the direction of the Communist Party, known simply as the Women's Department, is the Women's Club of the village. In thousands of villages over the country, in the independent oriental republics of the east and south, in the frozen fastnesses of the north, women organizers penetrate to the most distant villages spreading the gospel of women's rights. I talked to an enthusiastic young woman who had been such an organizer in the Archangel Gubernia in the villages of the lake country which are completely isolated from the outside world for half the year. The women's vote is brought out, the women are led to take part in the various social and educational projects of the village—the cooperatives, the mutual aid societies, the school committees—and in general to take their places as intelligent citizens.

Practically every village has its Mutual Aid Society for the purpose of aiding the poor, the aged, the crippled, and the orphaned members of the population. While the care of these classes is normally the function of the government, just as in the case of the society for raising funds for adult education to aid the Department of Education, so these local organizations, in view of the poverty of the government budgets, share in this social obligation. Graduated dues are provided according to the economic status of the member. Certain sections of land are set apart and cultivated for the fund, and occasional benefits of one sort or another are held. The resources of this fund may be used to make loans for

seed, to give medicines to the poor, or food and clothing in cases of emergency, such as to families that have been ruined by fire or flood. In other words, the Mutual Aid Society is the Associated Charities and Red Cross of the Community on the healthier basis of a sort of social insurance, to which the person in need may appeal without the usual connotations of charity.

#### THE VILLAGE YOUTH

Mention has already been made of the organizations of youth, the Pioneers and the Komsomols. But the Party, like the church, pushes its claims to the child still further back. Indeed, Trotsky, among other party leaders, has definitely advocated the conscious building of a whole new system of revolutionary ritual and custom to surround the individual from the cradle to the grave. Instead of christening the baby, the ardent revolutionary parent of the village makes of his infant an Octobrist. At a meeting with fitting speeches the child is dedicated to the new social order and given a name of revolutionary significance. A pair of twins so dedicated in one village of my knowledge were named for Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg, respectively. *Iskra*, or "spark," the title of Lenin's first revolutionary journal, is not an uncommon name for a child, while even more strange given names are concocted in Russian fashion from the syllables and initials of several words. For example, I know a young peasant, now an officer in the Red Army, who named his helpless child Seevren, a word made up from the first syllables of the words, "system, time, and energy."

At the age of seven the boy or girl becomes eligible to membership in the Pioneer organization. This move-

ment, as far as its physical activities are concerned, is modelled after the Scout Movement of England and America. These red-kerchiefed boys and girls are found throughout the country, hiking, camping, singing, marching. Their motto is "Always Ready." The stories they hear around the camp fire at night, or in the club room, are tales of the young Lenin, rehearsals of the battles and romances of the Russian Revolution and of the world struggle for the rights of the worker. From this early age they are inculcated with the ideas of the Communist state and the continued class struggle. They are taught habits of cleanliness and neatness. They must not smoke. They are expected to help in every local social undertaking which their ages will permit.

The organization of the Communist Youth, or Komsomols, takes the older youth, boys and girls together, and provides activity for them until they are twenty-three. Then if they have been admitted to the Party they are assigned to regular Party work.

The Komsomols undertake a more technical education of their members in the fields of history and politics. The young men and women are expected to take an active part in the life of the village, particularly in the cooperative undertakings. They become protagonists of the soviet regime among the mass of young people. They take part in the local theatricals and they are particularly interested in athletics. Soccer has taken hold of the village almost as completely as baseball possesses the youth of America. Games are played between neighboring villages all through the outdoor season. Athletics are not native to Russia and the Komsomols have become its chief promoters in the village. The English speaking visitor may be surprised to hear

the old familiar terms, football, boxing, basketball, ringing in strange accents from the athletic green of the remotest village in Russia. Most of the villages have some sort of simple outdoor gymnastic apparatus, such as ladders, horizontal bars and the like, which, although it often shows little evidence of use, indicates a widespread movement toward an ideal of *physcult*, as they call it, and toward the production of "sports-men," another good English word they have adopted.

Just what general effect these movements are having on the mass of Russian youth is problematical. There are plenty of people to tell you, from the village priest to perfectly good Communists, that the youth of the country is going to the devil. There can be no doubt whatever that the Revolution tended to break up still further the old moral and social sanctions which throughout the world were disturbed by the War. The long drawn out War, civil war, blockade and famine of Russia contributed an uncertainty and a terror to life that brought too early maturity to the children who lived through it all. Millions of children were orphaned and thrown upon their own resources to half starve in ill-equipped and poorly supplied children's homes or to wander as waifs up and down the great railway lines of the country. It is estimated that not less than forty thousand waifs still wander with free fancy and light fingers in the North Caucasus section alone. I asked the usual grown-up question, "What are you going to be when you grow up?" of a lad of twelve in Samara Gubernia several years ago, and was told solemnly by this little old man, "I don't know what I am going to do now. My life is already ruined."

Boys and girls of sixteen or seventeen had seen enough of all the tragedies and woes of life by the end of the

famine and Civil War to make skeptics and misanthropes of them all. It is true that out of this period has grown much license. From what I can learn, peasant youth in the old days were sexually natural and unmoral. Early marriage was the rule, and illegitimacy and abortion, while they occurred, were rare. Certainly both these evils have increased during these unsettled times, and there has been added, as a heritage of the war, almost a scourge of venereal disease which is sweeping through the villages. It is also true that there is much drunkenness among the younger men, and that in the campaign against hooliganism which has been vigorously carried on throughout the country, many cases of rowdyism were reported from the village. The inroads of divorce are affecting the conservative villages less than the city, but even the peasant youth is more and more frequently resorting to the simple civil registration for marriage and getting himself unmarried as simply when occasion demands. There was at one time a complaint that the hard-headed farmer often married a husky wife for the harvest season and divorced her when her services were no longer needed.

Even discounting the natural tendency of age to find fault with youth, there can be no doubt that the march of events from 1913 to, let us say, 1923, has made an impression on the younger generation of Russia that will not soon be forgotten. Yet the power to rise out of such a morass of suffering and social and moral chaos is perhaps, after all, the most striking phenomenon of the Russian youth of today. In the very wake of death and horror in the famine district of Samara Gubernia I remember how the young people, with the first sign of a new harvest, clothed themselves in the bright colors of holiday dress and danced gaily in the village square,

led by the gay pipings of the accordion. These youths have never despaired. One needs only to hear them sing to discover not only an air of this new freedom which has too often turned to license, but also the spirit of the new world that is building.

Now and then some boy or girl emerges from the struggle like a clean shaft of light, an omen of the new day that lies ahead for Russia. I remember particularly a Sunday afternoon spent on a wind-swept hilltop in the shade of a Dodge truck, with one of these inhabitants of the new world. He was a student from the Agricultural Academy at Moscow, a village boy, a Kom-somol. I had heard him make a good speech at a Kom-somol meeting. I had seen him at work on a binder through the long hours of a hot harvest day. I had seen him tolerant of a group of religious students beside whom he worked, in spite of his own contrary opinions. On that afternoon our talk turned to books, for I had found him reading. He knows his Tolstoy and Turgenev, and the tendencies in modern verse. He remarked sagely that such troublous times as Russia had seen recently did not produce great literature but that that would come with peace. He spoke of books and his own thoughts with the poise and certainty of a man who has found a new way of life and is steadfastly walking in it.

There were a few more of the same brand in our group of students. Others of their kind throughout Russia balance the discouraging flippancy and looseness of the general mass and insure the future against regression.

Perhaps the most discouraging feature of all the organized work in the village among the youth, and in other social enterprises as well, is the lack of qualified

leadership. These youth movements are new undertakings. The leaders must come out of the villages themselves, or the larger centers, and they must be developed by stumbling experience, like all other learning processes in Russia. The value of such activities, since it depends so largely upon the character and ability of the leaders, varies widely in different villages and districts.

The social life of the young people remains simple, though an atmosphere of Main Street is beginning to appear here and there in the sections nearest the cities. In the villages I have known the young folk to gather in the square on a moonlit evening to dance the old dances to the tune of the accordion. The folk songs are sung in remarkable harmony by almost any chorus of villagers that gathers. Arm in arm, maid and cavalier stroll in the shadier spots and whisper nothings hour after hour. But the importations from the west have included the shimmy and the fox trot, and once, at a movie in Tzaritzan, the orchestra in almost classic mood burst into what my startled ears were compelled to recognize as "Yes, We Have No Bananas." One shudders to think of what may happen if, or rather when, these concomitants of "civilization" fall upon the unsuspecting countryside of Russia.

But whatever the new village may be, certainly the old life is passing away. Looking back in perspective on the two or three villages I have known with some degree of intimacy, I find no picture of a sleepy, motionless mass of bearded *mujiks*, but a sense of almost feverish activity. The active Communist of the village almost needs a secretary to keep account of his various meetings. The Narodni Dom, especially in the winter, is a lively hive of many activities. There is sometimes



a distinct sense that this is stimulated activity. But it is activity with a purpose, which little by little must make its impression even on the stolid peasant.

"THE LITTLE RED SCHOOL HOUSE"

We must now turn our attention briefly to that instrument of re-creation which most prophets of doom overlook in Russia, the public school, especially as it affects the village. Let us first be done with the patent and painful inadequacies of the system which have resulted from the poverty of the country. No one is more ready to admit and complain of this than the Russian educator himself. The educational budget, for the most part, has been thrown back on the local community since the introduction of the New Economic Policy, and now, wherever you may go you are told of the lack of means for forwarding the plans of the leaders. I found the facts that follow in a devastating criticism of a report of Lunacharsky, the Commissar of Education, in *Izvestia* for November 7, 1926.

The number of schools is still less than before the Revolution. Only forty-six percent of the children of school age are in school. While the first section of the system is theoretically a four-year course, as a matter of fact 64.3 percent of all the schools of the Union are three-year schools with one teacher. Worse still, in 1925-26 only 7.8 percent of the pupils finished this first course, instead of the normal 25 percent to 30 percent. Two-thirds of the pupils are boys, and in the villages the difference between the number of boys and girls is still greater. We found these general conditions repeated, on a small scale, in our county in the North Caucasus. In 1925-26 only 44 percent of the children

of school age were in school. In the village of Maslov Kut not more than fifteen or twenty of the hundred and fifty that start to school finish the third year. The others, as has always been the case, must work in the fields.

Naturally, under such circumstances, compulsory education is hardly thought of as yet. In selecting the pupils, those from the lower ages, between eight and twelve, are taken first. Of these, acting on the usual class lines, the children of the poorest families are given preference. The assumption is that the richer peasants can unite and hire their own teacher. Actually there is rarely a teacher to be found, so that we have at present class education with the ancient tables turned. Without considering the politics of this procedure, it is certainly a questionable method for the selection of the children most capable of profiting by an education.

Teaching, especially in the lower grades, has always been regarded more as a profession in Russia than it is in the United States, where the school teaching, especially in the rural districts, has had low requirements and has too often been regarded as a step toward matrimony. In attending local teachers' conventions, I have always been struck with the maturity of the teachers and the number of men found among them. The present requirements for a certificate for a teacher of the lower grades include a four-year special course after the completion of the middle school. This course, however, is sometimes abridged to keep up the supply of teachers. Three county conferences are held each year, including a summer institute. At all of these attendance is required. In this way teachers are kept in touch with the latest developments in their field. The educational workers are, of course, unionized like other work-

ers. Salaries are still miserably poor, ranging from fifteen to thirty dollars a month, with quarters provided for the head of the school, usually a room in the school building. The average wage is not so high as that of a skilled workman.

School buildings are insufficient, and little building of any sort has been done since the revolution. Private houses in the village have often been commandeered for school purposes and remodeled. Such makeshift quarters are rarely well lighted or ventilated, and like all peasant houses, have low ceilings. The old school buildings I have found are usually well planned, with at least two classrooms and quarters for the head teacher. In many villages I have found these buildings used for two shifts of pupils, even in this period when such a small percentage of the children are in school. An enormous amount of building will need to be done before the mere requirement of space can be fulfilled for the reception of all the children of the country.

Examined thus objectively, the educational picture of Russia is a black one. What the accomplishments have been in the face of unimaginable poverty, the loyalty of the teachers, the entire change of teaching ideals—this is another and a thrilling picture. I remember that a bare four years ago paper and pencils were luxuries in the schools we saw in Samara Gubernia. Even chalk was hard to get, and in some places a nail and a piece of board to scratch on was the best that could be had. Every scrap of paper that had a bit of unused surface was salvaged. School books were equally scarce. The only hope was the patience and ingenuity of the teacher, who, in the midst of famine and poverty, toiled on to spread the light.

The most remarkable achievement of the whole period

has been the adoption and installation of an entirely new theory and method of education, from the first grade to the university. Scott Nearing has recorded the pedagogical miracles of this change in his study, *Education in Soviet Russia*. Here it will suffice to testify that these new methods have in these few years reached the villages of the farthest ends of the country. The name of Devi, as John Dewey is called in this language without the letter "w," is known to the humblest of village school teachers. Methods of study and self-government which have been charily tried in exclusive and expensive schools of America, can be found in practice with varying degrees of success in the remotest parts of the country. The village school child is no longer a submissive automaton sitting parrot-like at the feet of a czar-like teacher and priest to repeat his three "r's" and the catechism. There is a sense of conscious dignity in the school room which soon overtakes the smallest child, as he realizes himself a part of the learning process and a member of a social democracy.

I remember very well how this contrast struck me when a few months ago I rode home with a peasant in the Leningrad Gubernia over sixteen cobbled miles and listened to tales of his boyhood, and then went, a day or two later, to the school house of his youth to visit the present school. The entire education of this man, now a member of the Gubernia Central Committee, had consisted of three terms in the village school which had been provided by an unusually liberal-minded landlord for his peasants. And most of that time, as he described it, had been spent in learning the church prayers and catechism and the momentous fact that Adam begat Cain and Abel. The school I found is another institution entirely. The teachers are a man and wife

of more than usual education and intelligence who drifted into the village during the famine period and remained to become part of the community. I found that the husband was not so popular in the village. My hostess told me that he could not forget that he is the son of a general. But the wife began by endearing herself as a nurse during the epidemic of influenza in 1920, and has retained a firm place in the hearts of the whole district. She takes an active part in the life of the village and has been made a member of the soviet.

This district is fortunate in being able to provide room and teachers for all the children of school age, but for various reasons, including poverty and indifference on the part of the parents, some of them still do not attend. I found the school in session when I called. Seated at their desks, the picture the children presented must have been to all outward appearance much the same as that of a hundred years ago. The same simple cotton Russian shirt, with a cord about the little waist, boots, or woven bark *lapti*, with legs encased in skillfully wrapped cloth. Trousers were often patched, and there was one boy with a shirt so torn that he was ashamed to rise and recite. The girls, too, were in simple cotton print dresses, boots or *lapti*. A few even had shoes. But the teacher, I noticed at once, was called simply "Sergei Ivanovich," the way one equal addresses another. The calls to recitation and other requests were conveyed first to a bright tow-headed young Slav who was acting as monitor for the day. He then turned and repeated the order to the class in stentorian tones. The geography lesson was built around the presence of the visitor from America, with liberal use of the globe and of a cleverly-made cut-out of the hemisphere which was pinned to the

wall for the occasion. In the next room where the upper classes were taught by the wife, history was being read aloud and discussed, much as we often do. Before the end of the period I was shown the collection of wall newspapers that had been made by the school during the past year. These have become common throughout Russia in all the factories, clubs, unions, in fact every form of organized life. In them the children, too, find a medium of expression, for criticism pro and con, for suggestions and recommendations that not only affect themselves but the visiting parents as well. All the work of the papers, illustrations as well as articles, is done by the children, and then they are posted on the wall for all to see.

I had tea with the teachers at the noon recess. While we sat at the table two youngsters burst into the room to report some misdemeanor on the part of a boy or girl. The teacher in both cases simply said, "Very well, tell Ivan that we shall take up his case later, and it may not be very pleasant for him."

When the informers were gone my host told me that all discipline is now in the hands of the pupils themselves, who appoint a committee to hear the cases and to impose penalties. Corporal punishment is never permitted. This son of a military officer told me that at first he was very much disturbed at the idea of self-discipline among pupils, but that he is now thoroughly converted to the new idea and would not think of returning to the old system.

The whole plan of education takes as its basis the acquaintance of the child with his environment, and is so arranged that this experience and investigation moves out gradually from the home and village to the more complicated social structure. The teacher may be seen

not only in the school room with his pupils, but on a walk through the fields and woods, or on a trip of sanitary inspection in the village, or on an excursion to some nearby place of interest.

It is needless to say and yet to my mind is too lightly dismissed in considering the future of Russia, that the political basis of the educational system is Communist. During the first four years in the ordinary village school, political instruction is incidental and is simply included in the course of the ordinary studies. But every reader or history that is examined bears the mark of the new era in Russia. The heroes of the new stories are the leaders and martyrs of the revolutions of the world and of Russia particularly. Marx and Lenin look down from portraits on the walls. The holidays that are kept are those that observe revolutionary events. More than this, the whole ideology of the child is bent from the beginning to regard work and the worker as the most noble things in the world. The merchant, the profiteer, the Nepman, as the new rich of the present regime are called, are the ogres of the fairy tales. The kulak is the villain painted blackest to every peasant child.

This vast network of village schools, still handicapped by poverty of every sort, is perhaps having the largest single influence on the future of Russia of any agency at work. The authorities are fully aware of this political significance of the school, and often deliberately choose a teacher of poor academic training rather than of possibly unsound political bent. This does not mean that all of the teachers are Communists. As a matter of fact, but a small percentage of them are Party members. But the army that has been recruited to lead the children to a new day is loyal to the new order, even if

they are having, like other professions, to learn many things by practice.

I sometimes watch groups of children coming from school with the sudden consciousness that here is a whole generation already on the verge of young manhood and womanhood who know only the soviet regime, children who are equipped with a whole new set of world ideas which they will be presently called upon to put into practice. The success or failure of the Revolution ultimately depends upon this rising generation, or perhaps upon their children.

#### THE VILLAGE DOCTOR

According to available statistics for 1912, there was one graduate physician for every 21,900 of the village population of all Russia. All the public health work done was inaugurated by the zemstvo and maintained by that semi-social, semi-political organization. From 1871 to 1911 they had increased the expenditures for public health from two to forty-eight million roubles annually. A net work of very creditable hospitals had been spread over the country, stationed in most of the provincial towns and district centers and even in many of the smaller villages. But by far the greater part of the population of Russia in need of medical attention never came in touch with a physician at all. They resorted either to the *feldsher* or the *babka*. The *feldsher* originally came from the army where he had received his training as a surgeon's assistant, but the zemstvo finally established schools for the production of this half-baked medico which assured him of a little more systematized training than he had received in the army, and turned him out, at best, on a par with the



old-fashioned country doctor of America. At worst, he continued an ignorant dispenser of potions which were valued by the peasant in proportion to their bitterness and immediate effectiveness. The babka is the ancient village herb woman, known to all lands at some stage of their history, and particularly sought as a midwife. Feldshers are no longer produced, but both of these institutions persist and continue to be the main medical resource of the village.

The already small supply of physicians in Russia was decimated by the ravages of disease following in the wake of war and famine. They seem to have been particularly subject to typhus. The medical schools of Moscow and Leningrad and other university centers have been turning out new graduates by the hundreds in courses much too hurried, according to technical standards. But the village remains understaffed, for neither the old physicians nor the new graduates are willing to forsake the amenities of the urban centers for the rustic life of the village. As a consequence, I am told by an American physician who has been working among the hospitals of Leningrad for the past several months, the city is crowded with physicians who eke out an existence at salaries of forty to fifty dollars a month who might receive three or four times as much in provincial centers, whence come pathetic calls for help. It is one of the favorite schemes of this practical government to exile doctors under political suspicion to the hinterlands where their services are needed.

An example may be taken in Archangelskoe County of the Ter District. We found there in 1926 three physicians and five feldshers for a population of 38,000. The county center has a very passable hospital which has been established within the last year in the excellent

building formerly occupied by the county headquarters of the old regime. All three physicians are on duty here, while the largest town of the county, a village of ten thousand inhabitants fifteen miles distant, is solely dependent on an aged feldsher. The medical plans of the country suppose free service to all regularly employed workers and peasants. To this end every village center of considerable size, or at least every township center, has its public health clinic. In most cases these clinics are housed in former peasant homes remodeled to meet the needs of the work. There are five such centers in the county of Archangelskoe. All of them are busy places during the regular hours from nine to three. Particularly on market days the ante-rooms are crowded with all manner of bandaged and stricken humanity. We found the chief clinic receiving seventy patients a day in the summer season, when all who can possibly work are busy in the fields. In the winter this number is doubled. The patient is expected to pay for his medicines if he can. The Mutual Aid Society investigates pleas of poverty and provides for the prescriptions of those who are found really unable to pay.

All regular employees of such concerns as the sovhoz, or even of richer peasants who employ more than two workers, are covered by a social insurance paid by their employer. This provides for free medical and dental care, and for full pay during illness. In the case of the American company operating the sovhoz in Archangelskoe County, it was found more satisfactory to provide an American doctor than to depend on already overworked county physicians for medical attention.

Not only are the county physicians expected to do the work of the clinics, but they are the sanitary and

school inspectors. According to the plan of the educational department, every school child is expected to have a medical examination four times each year. This is manifestly impossible with the inadequate medical staffs provided, but it is done in those villages having a feldsher or doctor.

The county medical budget in 1926 was 30,676 doubles, and the average salary of physicians in the district is about 75 roubles. They are permitted to carry on private practice after office hours, and many of the better surgeons and physicians in the small cities are thought to make handsome sums in this way, using their official positions simply as excuses for their private practice.

Trained nurses, as we think of them in America, are practically unknown in Russia. In the villages the so-called nurses are little more than orderlies to assist the doctor or feldsher in the clinic or hospital. But dentists are more keenly missed by Americans than any other minister to human physical frailty. We were compelled to go a hundred miles from Maslov Kut to the nearest city boasting such a luxury. Even in Lenin-grad I found dental science, as practiced by a man reputed to be one of the best in the city, at least twenty-five years behind American progress. Fortunately, black bread and rough food keep the peasant's mouth in fairly good condition. Consequently the only attention he demands is the forceps in the hands of the feldsher in the case of an occasional recalcitrant tooth.

Infant mortality is still high. The Archangelskoe County records show a death rate per thousand births of 186.5 for male children and 173 for females. This is a black showing compared with the rate of 83.5 and

67.3 respectively in the United States. Proper care and feeding of children are practically unknown, and the wonder is that as many survive as we find swarming the village streets. Screened houses are seen only in pictures. Flies abound in every peasant home, and worse, insects are by no means uncommon. Children are eating watermelon and cucumbers often literally before they are weaned. The food value of milk for children has taken no hold on the practice of parents, which is not an unmixed evil as the mongrel cattle of the village often have tuberculosis. Epidemics of scarlet fever and measles sweep through the villages at times with terrible havoc.

Taken as a whole, and statistically examined, the medical situation in the village, like that of the schools, is a sombre picture. It is only when we see this age-old heritage of ignorance and backwardness, heightened by the poverty growing out of war and famine, as a background for heroic struggle with disease and epidemics that we are moved to rise to paeans of praise. The American physician at the Reconstruction Farms at Maslov Kut, who knows the hospitals and clinics of the entire district, states that the services rendered by their medical staff would be more than doubled by adequate supply of drugs and instruments. Simple bandages for minor surgery must often be supplied by the patient from any piece of cloth at hand. The District Medical Department supplies the more common medicines, but many drugs used daily in prescriptions in the United States are unobtainable and have been so for so long that physicians in the village have almost forgotten their use.

In the face of all this, I have seen doctors forty miles

from the railway in Samara Gubernia, even in the midst of famine, maintaining an orderly, clean hospital and working miracles with a supply of drugs hardly adequate for a first aid cabinet in an American bathroom. Our American physician has often come home from the local hospital within the last year marveling at the skill and patience and real knowledge of the county doctors. Continuous campaigns of picture and text are flung on every public wall of the country, warning against venereal disease, smallpox, malaria, or tuberculosis. Parallel pictures are shown revealing the results of proper and improper food and living conditions. The lurid pictures showing the results of syphilis and gonorrhea are calculated to be a deterrent to the most foolhardy. Mothers are gathered in groups for lectures on child care. Attractive posters with rows of marching babies carrying banners demanding milk, fresh air, sensible clothing and sunlight are posted in the cooperative stores, the railway stations, or anywhere the people congregate. The children are taught laws of health and sanitation in the school. The county fair in our county last summer had its ardent worker from the Women's Society discoursing from her booth on the same topics.

True, many of these topics are still academic. Flies may be found swarming in a hospital beneath a picture depicting the horrors of the typhoid fly. But if any of the psychological bases for advertising are correct, these campaigns must eventually bear fruit. Given a fair chance, the next few years should see the burden of poverty raised from this essentially rich country and a greater possibility of making effective many of the excellent plans which are already projected. Swamps

that are already mapped as malarial centers may be drained and the land turned to rich production. Hospitals can be equipped. Physicians can be paid more adequately. In the meantime standards of medical education are being raised, and the number of qualified physicians for the village districts is gradually increasing.

## CHAPTER IX

### SMICHKA

LITERALLY *smichka* means a "joint" or "binding," a sort of dove-tailing, as used in cabinet making. As widely used in Russia today it is applied to the much sought understanding and cooperation between the city and the village. But it implies more than mere cooperation. It desires a real joining into a compact economic and social whole. Politically this is one of the ideas which at present command a central place in Party tactics. The summarizing resolution of the Fifteenth Party Conference in November, 1926, declared:

"All measures in Agriculture must proceed from the necessity of the further strengthening of the union of the workers with the fundamental mass of the peasantry—the poor and middle class peasant."

The economic interdependence of city and country everywhere is a truism. In Russia, where the city has been compelled, during the last ten years, to ride on the back of the peasant, the relation from one side, at least, has become painfully patent. The peasant has seen his grain requisitioned to feed the city which at the same time was giving him nothing in return. Even the more recent and better times, as we have noticed, have at best brought him from the city poor and few goods at high prices. Meantime, if he pays a visit to his nearest city, he finds that the worker is better clothed, better housed, supplied with beautiful club rooms, in short,

in all outward aspects better off than the villager.

On the other hand, however, the last twenty years before the War saw the heaviest increase of city population in the history of the country, and as a consequence, the city still has very clear memories of the village. The village, indeed, is still home. More than this, during all these years a very real contact has been maintained between the worker and his village. I have visited factories in the industrial district near Moscow whose location in the country makes possible an easy alternation between the loom and the plow. There are scores of villages within a radius of fifty miles or more from Leningrad with vacant peasant cottages whose masters have gone to the city to work but who either come back or send their families every summer. I have already pointed out the large proportion of peasants among the registered unemployed of Leningrad during the winter of 1926-27. Country cousins are constantly visiting their relatives in the city. Every local train pours its stream of sheepskin coats and felt boots into the largest of the cities. The public markets provide a place for a continuance of the village custom of bargaining directly with the producing peasant. All of which has delayed the growth of the city proletarian known to London or Paris, or even to a city as young as New York, who has lived in the city for generations and to whom the very source of milk and bread are a mystery. I have seen a cow kept in the very heart of Leningrad and a goat walking unabashed down one of the principal streets of the city beside his mistress.

Nevertheless, the problem of smichka is present and is growing with the continued industrialization of the country. Definite steps are being taken to bring it



about. To begin with, every journal and newspaper, every possible flaming poster, by word and picture dwell upon the desirability of such a union. The co-operative movement is used as a great educational and practical means of bringing it about. *The Farmer's Calendar* pictures in arresting colors on its cover page a peasant with his sheaf beside the mechanic at his bench, with the tomb of Lenin between and below them. Co-operative posters show the products of the farmer going on peasant wagons into the city and returning laden with manufactured wares to the village cooperative. Every gubernia assembly has its real dirt farmer representatives. The Union of Soviets, when it meets at Moscow, and the Central Executive Committee which it elects, have actual peasants from every corner of the vast country in their councils. Certainly these delegates do not play a large part in the complicated economic deliberations of these bodies, but their contributions in making known the wishes of the peasantry are heeded with attention and become the basis of many a momentous decision.

These delegates also play a large symbolic and dramatic part. About the time of the celebration of the ninth anniversary of the Revolution I met a peasant member of the Leninfrad Gubernia Central Committee in his room at the Farmer's House in Smolny Institute. During our conversation, the energetic and modern-minded young host of the Farmer's House asked the delegate, who wore a luxuriant black beard, why he did not shave.

"Well," said Ivan Kapitonich, "I did think about it. But I considered that it would not be best for the soviet. If visitors should come to our meetings and look around and see no beards they would ask 'Where are your peas-

ant members?" Just yesterday, for instance, I was commandeered to go out to Kronstadt and speak to the sailor boys there. After my speech they applauded for several minutes. They could hardly be stopped. Now they saw that I was a real peasant, but if I had had no beard, those boys would have thought we were fooling them. So I don't cut my beard."

A day or two later I went to the great public celebration of the Revolution to watch what seemed to be all Leningrad marching through the streets with banners flying and bands playing. I was lucky enough to get a ticket to the reviewing stand in front of the Winter Palace. The marching delegations from factories and organizations from all over the city swung out of the fog and mist of Peter's swampy city and shouted their greetings up at the President of the city soviet, or responded to his proposals of "Health to the Party of Lenin!" or "Good Health to the Unity of the Communist Party in the Way of Lenin!" Presently I noticed at my side a new center of interest in a rival bearer of greetings. A gray-bearded peasant standing in the front row was shouting and raising his cap to the marchers with all the confidence and vigor of the official reviewer himself, "Long live the smichka between the village and the city!" "Health to the Unity of Peasant Workers!" Almost invariably the greeting was answered with a lusty shout from the marching ranks.

In addition to these various forms of more or less natural and incidental overtures of city to village, two organized movements for promoting this union must be noted. The first of these is the organization known as the "Workers' Society for the Union of City with Village" or in brief simply *Smichka*. This free will

organization, begun in Leningrad by a little group of sixty workmen in one of the factory districts of the city in 1923, has spread to every industrial center of the country and numbers millions of members.

The Leningrad society itself has a total membership of 354,095, with local groups in every factory of the city. The income of the organization from its annual dues of one rouble is increased by special concerts, the operation of two or three motion picture shows, and other such special means. The total income for the first half of 1926 was 252,123 roubles. The activities of the society, which at first took on the more dramatic forms of the visitation of theatrical troupes to the village, the adoption of certain villages by a factory, and the like, have, in the last year or so, settled down to the much more practical business of advancing loans to various cooperative organizations of the villages and supporting nurses, doctors, agronomes, and other village social workers.

The annual report of the Leningrad society reads like a catalogue of all the social and economic activities of the most progressive village of the new Russia. Aid is given to reading rooms and libraries. Speakers are sent out on the occasions of great holidays, elections, and special campaigns, to help the local leaders. During the last year, loans were made to consumers' and farmers' cooperatives. Horses and tractors were advanced to collectives of the village. Six agronomes were maintained in the gubernias of the northwest section. Veterinarians were sent throughout the section. Mills, blacksmith shops, and fire departments were organized by the aid of the society throughout the villages of the northwest. Three hundred paid workers were maintained, including organizers of Women's Departments, agronomes,

doctors, and midwives, in addition to the administrative workers of the organization itself.

Workers are urged to take their vacations in the villages, and instructions and special meetings are held to inform those going to the village for a few weeks or a month what he may do to extend the friendship between the two groups. In 1925 nearly thirty thousand workers from Leningrad going on vacations attended such meetings before they left. These vacationers distributed thousands of pieces of literature, helped in local village meetings, and in general carried the gospel of cooperation. More than this, they brought back from the village to their fellow-workers of the city thousands of reports concerning what they had found in the country. Students from the universities and technical schools of the cities going home to the village for the summer, or assigned to practical work in the smaller factory centers, are also sent out with definite programs of work, including plans for participation in local social and political activities.

Thus we have again the old revolutionary idea of "going to the village." This time, however, it is the workingman who turns to the peasant and speaks to him in language he can understand rather than in the vague poetic language of world brotherhood and social revolution used by the old student groups. More than this, the city is sending to the village material aid which it needs and appreciates.

The other new and, to me, one of the most interesting phases of this program of "faces toward the village," is the institution known as the *Dom Krestyanina*, or "House of the Peasant." I first knew one of these unique centers at Pyatigorsk, the capital of Ter District, in the Caucasus mountains. The building

there with its great sign across the front is located quite properly on the market square, where hundreds of farmers come in every week, especially on Monday, the big market day. At this house, the villager may find a clean white bed for less than twenty cents a night. The mother may leave her baby with a nurse while she goes about her shopping. An agronomist is on duty to advise about planting a new crop or to analyze diseases that have appeared in the wheat or oats or potatoes. A doctor and a veterinarian are at hand to minister to the ills of man and beast. A lawyer is provided for the convenience of those seeking legal advice. An attractive, clean dining room is open to the public in the same building, but is especially intended for the use of the farmer. And all of this is absolutely free to real farmers, except the small payment for lodging.

This Pyatigorsk house also provides well for the leisure moments of the farmer who drops in for an evening. A well-equipped reading room with a young woman in attendance is stocked with all the magazines and newspapers which could possibly interest the ordinary peasant. For those who cannot read, periods are arranged for reading aloud in both German and Russian—for there are many German colonists in the vicinity. This room is used also as the center of small discussions. Trained men are prepared to turn a question or a comment into a public discussion on practically any topic that may be regarded as particularly valuable or interesting. A regular series of reports and lectures is also arranged in the little theatre of the house, which is, incidentally, one of the most attractive small halls of its kind I have seen in Russia. The director told me proudly that all the officials of the district government are at the call of the farmers for reports, questioning,

or lectures, and must comply with a request for such service when summoned by the Farmer's House. An attractive and growing agricultural museum occupies one of the large rooms.

Of course there is a Lenin Corner, a red-draped room so solemn in its portraits, busts, and wall mottoes of the great leader that I instinctively took off my hat the first time I entered it. From this center radiates the political propaganda which forms a part of every program of social work in all Russia.

So, there by the market place, stands this friend and city relative of all the villages who come up to the town on business. Ivan may drive into the courtyard with confidence, put up his horse and check his belongings, drink a cup of tea, and go to bed in a safe and comfortable place, all for a few copeks—with all the educational features thrown in.

In Leningrad, the Dom Krestyanina is lodged in the famous Smolny Institute, where the October Revolution was born and where the government of the Leningrad Gubernia is now housed. This great city center, like the Central House in Moscow, is advertised widely by posters in the villages and on the railways, through the papers, and by word of mouth. The records for the mid-summer quarter of 1926 which I examined showed that assistance of one kind or another had been given to visitors, or inquiries by letter had been answered, from eight gubernias of the northwest sections of Russia. Two or three lawyers and an agronom are present every day to answer the questions that naturally come to this administrative center.

The report of the same summer quarter showed an impressive list of lectures, reports, radio concerts, motion pictures, and excursions to the various museums

and of the city of Leningrad. But perhaps the greatest practical service rendered by this house is the lodging facilities for individual farmers and for delegations which come to the city. The dormitories have a capacity of six hundred, including thirty small rooms which were formerly used for piano practice by the elegant young ladies of the institute. Nearly six thousand peasants made use of these lodging facilities during the three months whose records I examined—the mid-summer months when farmers are least likely to leave their homes.

Even the smaller cities and provincial towns are opening these friendly and helpful houses as the movement spreads. A few months ago I went down to one of the villages seventy or eighty miles from Leningrad as the guest of a peasant. His wife was waiting for him at the Dom Krestyanina of the little provincial city of thirty thousand at the end of our railway journey. Into this house on the market square we went on a cold drizzly day to a warm room where for a few copeks we had tea and bread and sausage before we set out on our long wagon journey home. When I came back to Leningrad, this was again our transfer station from village to city. I found a place to check my belongings while I went out into the town. Later I went up to the information bureau with the hope of tracking down some more material, but the young agronom in charge was so busy answering the questions of the line of peasants who were waiting that he refused a call to dinner from the dining room, and I came away only with the very definite impression that the place was functioning in fact, a statistic that may be recorded with equal weight at least among the possible figures I might have got.

Smirnov, the Commissar of Agriculture, reviewed the remarkable growth of this institution in *Izvestia* for November 29, 1926. The first Peasants' House was founded in 1918, but the movement had a very insignificant growth during the hard years that followed. By 1923 there were but fifty-seven in Russia proper. From this time on, however, the number increased rapidly until there are today, in Russia proper alone, 353 such houses. The central house is in Moscow. Seven of the capitals of Autonomous Republics have them, forty-three gubernias and districts, 202 provinces—*ooyezd*—and 100 counties. The commissar points out the significant fact that the movement has grown from the bottom upward, that is, at the initiative of the smaller city centers, thus showing the real function and need of the movement.

The accomplishments of these centers in Russia alone are astounding when marshalled in mere figures. More than 3,700,000 peasants were housed in the dormitories in 1925-26. More than a million attended lectures, reports, and discussions. A million and a half used the libraries. It is significant that more than half the millions of questions that were answered were concerned with problems of land and forest laws. And these figures are based only on the reports of the larger centers.

A still further example of the fact that the movement has had its origin in a need is the variety of its support. Part of the houses are financed directly by the state budgets, others by the Agricultural Department, a few by the Department of Education, and still others by the Cooperatives. The Commissar of Agriculture is proposing that the entire movement be centralized, given a more definite plan, and placed under the general direction of his own department. What-



ever the more highly organized form of the movement may be, it will continue to play a very important and real part in cementing the bond between the city and the village, for it is founded on very practical and intimate requirements of the peasant.

In spite of these movements, however, the main reason for suspicion and dislike on the part of the peasant toward the city largely remains. This is the disparity between the prices of his products and the manufactured articles he must buy. The industrial machinery of the country is beating down the prices on their articles with the greatest difficulty, even in the face of Party resolutions and instructions. Speakers, journals, papers, and calendars are at great pains to explain to the peasant how it has been necessary to give industry a start at the expense of the farmer and how it is impossible for the farmer to make further progress without the aid of industry in providing tools and implements. Therefore, say the leaders, industry and agriculture must rise together. City and country, they point out in various forms of repetition, are mutually dependent.

Thus, officially and unofficially, incidentally and in a definitely organized way, the city is turning to the village and pleading for cooperation. Its plea is delivered in the most effective fashion by actually cooperating in the practical economic and educational progress of its neighbor and brother. One comes from an examination of these overtures with the feeling that though it is still a long way from the *balalaika* of Maslov Kut to Tchaikovsky's *Sixth Symphony* in Leningrad, essential unity in spirit and people is there, and in the end *smichka* may be attained as in no other country in the world.

## CHAPTER X

### SOME CONCLUSIONS

THROUGHOUT these pages we have been examining facts, with the interjection of as few opinions as possible. These facts do not reveal an agricultural paradise. Many of the figures do little more than lay bare the appalling tasks that confront the leaders of the Soviet Government in their plans for building the new Union of Soviet Republics. But one conclusion is self-evident from any fair examination of these figures. That is that since 1922, or 1923 at the latest, the curve in every department touching the village has been upward. It can be protested in all fairness that conditions had reached the lowest possible limit for life and that there had to be improvement or complete disintegration. The astounding fact remains that, in spite of all the calamities of war, revolution, famine, and disease that plunged the unhappy country into the "lower depths," it did improve; that, still surrounded by a hostile ring of world enemies and handicapped with still more insidious inner foes, who have through these years impatiently awaited the downfall of the present regime, actual progress is being made.

First of all, in reviewing some of the gains of the peasant, remember that the Revolution has secured to him the land which he has always regarded as rightfully his. Ten years of the Soviet finds him more firmly intrenched in this possession than ever before.

Nothing less than another revolution and the force of a superior power can deprive him of it. What form land usage may take in the future cannot be predicted. Two tendencies are already clearly operative: a movement to combine plots of the old many-strip system into larger and more convenient family units, and the definite promotion on the part of the agricultural leaders of various forms of collective cultivation. The fundamental land law avows state ownership of all the soil. But, with the rearrangement into larger individual plots which goes steadily on, and the gradual return to the normal number of work animals which makes possible individual cultivation, it is very probable that the sense of private ownership will make much less simple the manipulation of land distribution. The one factor which can offset this tendency will be an ocular demonstration of an economically superior plan of social exploitation of the land. The whole collective movement which seeks to make this demonstration constitutes one of the most interesting experiments in agriculture being made anywhere in the world.

Meantime, with lowered personal vitality, decimated livestock, and scant capital, the dogged peasant has gone on sowing and reaping through drouth, locusts, and low sales prices. The tenth year of the Revolution sees an acreage approximately up to the pre-war level. Agriculture is ready to pass, at last, from the phase of reconstruction into a period of expansion and improvement.

Many of the inherited handicaps of the old regime remain to impede progress in this next step. Poorly distributed populations must be transplanted. Antiquated methods of cultivation must be replaced with modern practices. Machinery must be manufactured at home

and imported from abroad. But worst of all, the intangible weight of custom hangs like a leaden ball on the feet of the peasant. A sodden mass of indifference, and an ambitionless spirit of *nichevo* (it doesn't matter), still ride upon his back like a gray monster.

On the other hand, the various departments working on these problems have at least a running start. Experiments have been tried and abandoned by the score, so that the period of practical possibilities is faced with at least a few proved plans of progress. Proper crop rotation is spreading widely. The mechanization of cultivation, especially the introduction of the tractor, has laid hold of the farmer's imagination with the fervor of a fetish. The growth of technical crops is being pushed with success. The breed of livestock is on the way to much needed improvement. The country is still dreadfully poor, it is true, and all budgets, including the agricultural, are sadly inadequate. But this is a defect which can be cured with a continuance of the healthy improvement in production that is seen on every hand. On the whole, I believe that no fair-minded observer can avoid the conclusion that technically and productively agriculture in Russia is going forward.

When we turn to the peasant himself, I am always reminded of an experience in a village of Samara Gubernia during the last year of the famine. The enterprising Communist youths of the village arranged a debate on religion at the theatre of the Narodni Dom. The time had been set for five o'clock, and, thinking we knew the natives, my Russian companion and I went over about six. The theatre was already packed with probably five hundred people, and almost as many were standing outside in the mid-winter snow wanting to get in. I had expected to find a disorderly mob.

We found a well-conducted discussion. The Orthodox priest, a Baptist preacher, and two or three Party atheists were on the platform. The Mohammedan priest had been invited but could not come. The president of the local soviet, who was presiding, asked that for health's sake the audience stop smoking. The audience stopped, but the dignitaries on the platform continued to puff their *maborka*. Someone from the hall shouted, "So that's the way you teach us equality, is it?" Democracy was emerging. The speakers sheepishly put their heels on their cigarettes and the meeting proceeded.

The priest, outdoing our most earnest "outliners," undertook to give a history of the Christian religion in one hour. There was applause. Questions were asked and five-minute speeches were made from the floor. All in perfect order. The atheist rebuttal and criticism followed. More questions and speeches. Three hours slipped away, while the peasants sat wide awake and interested. We went home at nine, but the debate continued until midnight when it stopped out of deference to another day, by no means because the audience was exhausted or the subject concluded.

My companion was a woman of education and refinement who had lived in Petrograd before the Revolution. Her husband was a prominent lawyer who fled the city with the coming of the Revolution and later joined the Wrangel forces, where he was captured and executed. As we walked home she said to me:

"Well, whatever we may think about the Bolsheviks, something has happened to the peasant. I have known them all my life and I never before saw such a thing like that. Before they were like cattle. And here we have seen a mass of them sit through hours of purely

intellectual discussion with apparent interest. Yes, something new has come over them."

Surely something has happened to the peasant. It is not a great mass movement, not a cultural revolution. If a physical figure may be used to describe roughly a psychic process, it is like a blasting and crumbling action on an ancient monolith of ignorance and indifference. Tremors run through the whole mass at the shocks, but the general contour remains the same. The loosened chips that fall around the base still need gathering and cementing into unity in a new structure. The order changes, but slowly.

A Russian-American who returned to his native land not long ago after forty years in America wrote home to his sister:

"Today I saw a strange sight. Here in the shadow of the Kremlin I saw the same old woman in many skirts, village blouse, and kerchief, crossing herself before the Iberian Virgin, whom I saw forty years ago before another Virgin in Kiev."

This man's Communist soul was cast down to discover that Russia had not moved forward so rapidly as he had hoped to find. It has taken him months to discover hopeful signs of real progress. But to repeat Galileo, "It does move." There is a new curiosity among this stolid peasantry which may leave many a tractor wrecked by the roadside by its childish monkeying with new toys, but will eventually create a new mind.

On the political side, I am convinced that the peasant is taking a more active and intelligent part in the local government of his village. As I have pointed out, the Communist leaders are doing all in their power to in-

crease this participation, especially among the poorer peasants. This interest in his own political affairs, however, does not make of the peasant a proletarian. He remains a farmer with the essentially individualistic point of view of the farmers of the world. Still, this is an individualism qualified by a peculiar experience in hundreds of years of the social solidarity of the village commune. In addition, the very geography of the concentrated social structure of the village lends a starting point for some kind of collectivism.

By the decision of the majority in the recent inner Party struggle, the Communists have accepted the challenge of making a bulwark of socialism of these millions of petty property owners. This they propose to do, not by bringing them into the cities and there welding them to the proletariat, as was suggested, but through the agency of the village cooperatives, collective agriculture, and the slower processes of education.

More specifically, what of the peasant's attitude toward the Communists? I have said elsewhere in this study that he likes that government best which interferes with him least. His general attitude toward the machinery of State is characterized by indifference and an inherited suspicion of all government. It is against this very wall of indifference that the Soviet State is battering by every effort to make the local machinery of government simple and realistically near the everyday life of the village.

There is complaint. There is discontent. I have heard a burly young blacksmith proclaim loudly in the midst of a group of harvest workers the need of another revolution. But nothing could be more absurd than the picture of the little group of Paris émigrés playing at courts and princes and looking wistfully toward the

millions of peasants waiting for some royal deliverer to save them from the terrible Bolsheviki. If there is discontent, it is a healthy desire to rid the village of its petty tyrants, who are frequently the more resented because they are strutting peasants themselves. There is often outspoken resentment of leaders who are sent to the village "in an envelope" as they put it. But these are voicings of the new interest which is really encouraged, and not a fundamental discontent with the present order. That the peasant would take rifle in hand to restore the remotest Romanoff is inconceivable.

It is worth while to repeat that the share of the village in the government is far more than its representation at the polls or in the higher soviets. The whole policy of the government is constantly affected by the more or less inarticulate, but nevertheless understood desires of the peasant, principally because he still plays a part in the economy of this essentially agricultural country which is far too significant to be overlooked. By all means the agricultural production must be raised. Therefore the renting of land and the hiring of farm labor, directly contrary to the fundamental Communist ideas of land usage. Consequently, during this period and probably for a long time to come, the village is destined to act as an important balance wheel in this great creaking new machine, the Soviet State. Essentially conservative, imbedded in centuries of tradition and custom, and close to the elemental processes of nature that go on in spite of Czars, wars, and revolutions, the peasant plants, depends on the weather, and reaps what God gives him. Experiments are made in government and in farming. He shakes his head, shrugs his shoulders, and waits.

The feeling with which I came out of Russia the first



time, four years ago, has been deepened by two years of added experience. It is this: I have a profound sympathy for any movement which undertakes to make of these millions of peasants, with all their shortcomings and intrenched traditions of medievalism, a modern, self-governing state. This is a task more than doubled when the state undertaken is one which requires the utmost of mutual faith and cooperation—a socialist republic.

The foregoing conclusions I am prepared to call laboratory results. There are figures with which to sustain them. But no one who has known the peasant with any intimacy can fail to carry, as a part of his total reaction, certain feelings which contribute as certainly as any statistics to his final impression. On the negative side, my own experiences have brought me many times into such conflict with narrow-minded local officialdom, that at the moment I was quite ready to agree with another American, himself a Communist, who had worked for some time among the villages of Russia. I asked him what he thought of this local official class, and he replied with feeling evidently born of bitter experience, "God! I could boil them in oil!"

Nor would any American workingman who has known them in the field forgive me should I omit the indelible feeling that, compared to our standards, the peasant is lazy. Likewise, he is desperately slow and deliberate. Americans whom I have watched work with them are alternately moved by inclinations to murder and to suicide. Then, too, the ordinary peasant will, as instinctively and as harmlessly as a magpie, pick up loose belongings that are not his own.

These are among the thousand little things that have gone to add to the picture of the village. But, whereas

they once loomed large in the foreground, in the light of perspective they drop into their proper places of comparative insignificance, like gargoyles peering, part devilish, but mostly humorous, from the coping of a great building. Other and finer scenes swim into their proper place of preeminence.

I think of a clearing in the woods of Tver Gubernia and the waving of handkerchiefs and hats of the little group of communars who had come out to the edge of their settlement to bid us farewell, after having received us with cordiality and showing us with pride the accomplishments of their government-favored undertaking to live in Christian brotherhood in their commune. Or my mind runs south to a neat row of cottages where the members of the collective called "The Dawn of Communism" live together. Their two tractors hum in the upland plains above them day and night to the tune of a new ideal in agriculture and social living. I find myself crowding again to the counter of the well-managed and thriving cooperative store of our village. I hear the girls singing in the vineyards. I see the miles of rolling steppe calling for the long furrows. I ride again for days through fields of grain on either side of the railway, an omen of other acres still to be sown and reaped. And somehow I cannot be skeptical of the future.

Or the scene changes and I find myself looking into the upturned faces of a room full of peasants half revealed by the dim light of kerosene lamps brought from the homes and set on brackets on the walls of this village hall fifty miles from the railway. A symbol, I think, this half light dispelling the darkness, as these "dark people" listen to the impassioned speeches of their leaders telling of the meaning of the Revolution.

Again, I see burlap curtains jerked back with a dramatic swish to reveal the interpreters of a new village art treading the boards with a startling certainty and understanding.

I remember anew my journey to Lake's End with Ivan Kapitonovich, peasant keeper of bees and non-party member of the Gubernia Central Committee. I sit at dinner with the family and eat like an honored guest from a separate plate, while my host, his wife, and Katya, the daughter, share the common bowl. After the meal is cleared away and the tiny lamp is set on the table, my friend dons his spectacles and brings out the newspaper. A neighbor comes in to chat and inquire about the news. He wants to know particularly what Rykov has to say.

Ivan has had two and a half winters of schooling in his life, but Katya, now eighteen, has been to high school. She has studied French and German. Next morning I see her go with two buckets swung on the yoke across her sturdy shoulders to bring water from the creek at the bottom of the hill. Her housework finished, she slips out of her boots and coarse work-dress into French-heeled shoes and a tasteful frock to go over to the Little Red Corner at the school house to act as librarian for the group of five or six small villages of the neighborhood.

Watching from the window on the following day, I see the children from a neighboring village coming happy down the lane in bask shoes, through mud and drizzling rain, to school. There I know they are learning things never before taught to any Russian child, nor for that matter to any children in public schools. New heroes are being introduced, new ideals set up, new enemies described. And I reflect that the new

village belongs to these boys and girls, who alone, severed from the dead weight of the past and having a new mental content, will be able to make strides with seven-league boots.

All this, multiplied by the thousands, is, for me, the Russian village of today, sitting outwardly quiet by the muddy rivers of her plains or set in the evergreen of her forests, but, beneath, a seething round of activities, meetings, classes, schools, social and economic experiments. These forces are seeking a breach in the hedge of ignorance and indifference that has not only grown but has actually been cultivated around the village during the centuries out of which it has come. Those who have given themselves to this siege are fighting enemies less romantic, and less easily detected, than those against which the Revolution called them to battle. The victory will not come tomorrow nor next year. But the tide has turned. Forces have been set in motion, which, measured in terms of generations, will create a new village. What the exact form of this new social structure will be, no one can say. We have only an indication here and there. But the old village, however slowly, is passing away before our eyes.